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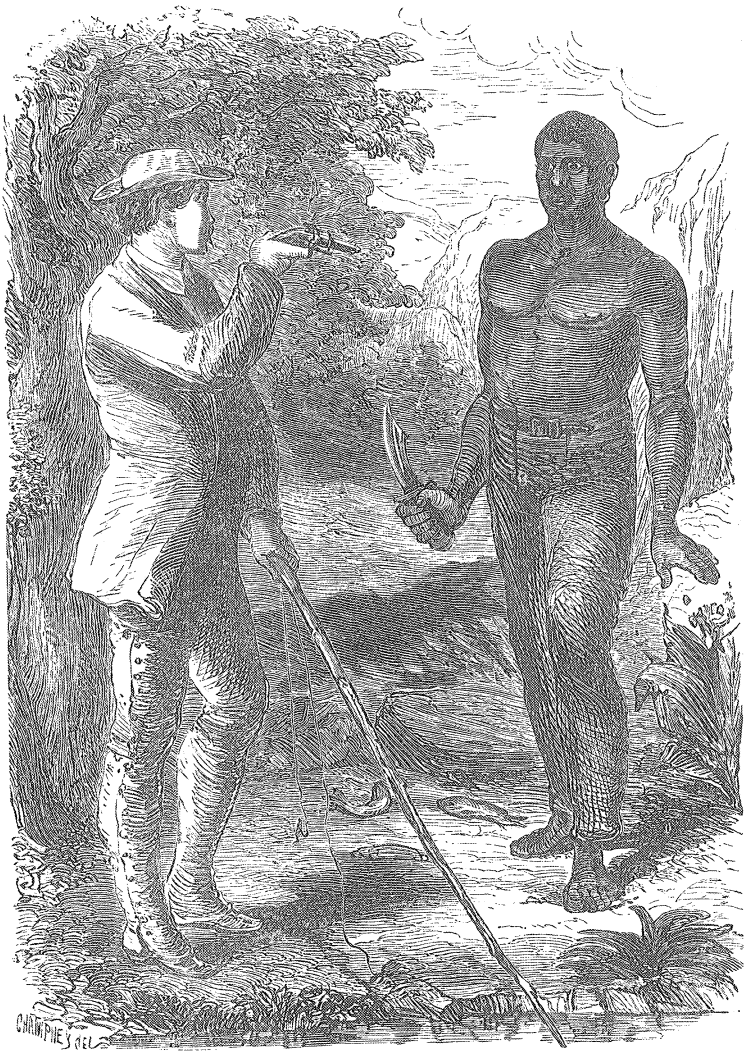

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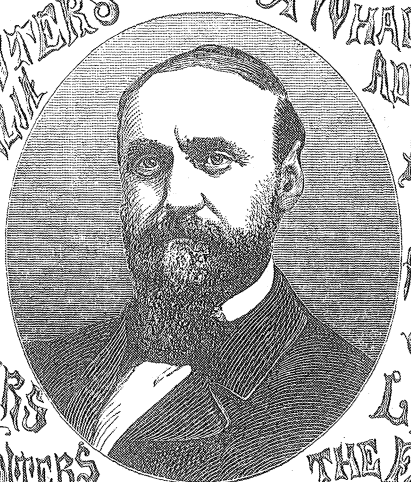

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A

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ON

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By W. H. THOMES,

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLD-HUNTERS' ADVENTURES IN AUSTRALIA," "THE BUSHRANGERS," "THE GOLD-HUNTERS IN EUROPE," "A WHALEMAN'S ADVENTURES," "LIFE IN THE EAST INDIES," ETC., ETC.

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A SLAVER'S ADVENTURES

ON SEA AND LAND.

CHAPTER I.

CONFESSIONS OF A SLAVER. — AN INCIDENT ON THE ICE. — ALICE MERTON AND HER DANGER. — SHE IS SAVED, AND IS GRATEFUL.

I DO not know what prompts me to write of my past life, unless it is the hope of deterring others from pursuing the same guilty career that I followed for ten long years; for I would give all my gold could I but forget the terrible events connected therewith. Nor is it singular that, while I was engaged in the slave trade, I had no thought excepting the desire to accumulate gold; that I enjoyed pleasure, could drink, eat, and make love with the most reckless of the class to which I belonged.

I am a lonely man, although still young and energetic. I dislike company; I hate to have men talk with me, for I suspect that they seek to worm my secrets from me. But if I refuse to listen to the troubles of men and women, it is not because I am heartless and unfeeling, for there is one whom I could hear speak forever, and not tire of her society. She is a blue-eyed girl, with dark-brown hair, and as innocent of worldly feelings and pretension as an angel. She does not know of my love, and probably will never suspect it; for how can I speak to her of it, and ask her to mate with me, steeped as I have been in crime? She knows not the cause of my seclusion; if she did, she would look upon me with horror, and avoid me in future. Her father is a worldly-minded man, knows of my wealth, and perhaps thinks that his daughter would be fortunate in securing me

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for my gold. He has paid so much attention to trade, that he has forgotten to give his child's heart the slightest attention. If he had studied it more, he would have found that not one particle of selfishness lurked there, and that when she loved, it would be for worth, and not wealth. She has a mother, a pious lady, who believes that her daughter is perfection; and in that point we agree, but on no other; for when she seeks to lead me to better thoughts, and to holy aspirations, I am mute until she has finished her harangue, and left me in peace. Yet I sometimes think that Mrs. Merton has a high regard for me, and would even be willing to trust her child's happiness through life to my care; but I dare not ask the sacrifice; for what would be said, if one of my old companions should make his appearance, and betray me to the world and its shame?

The family of the Mertons profess to be grateful to me for a service I once rendered them. I will relate the incident that happened by which I became acquainted with Alice, and let the reader judge whether I love her as a lover should love his mistress. I own an estate, where I reside summers and winters, that adjoins the Mertons'. It is situated near Boston, and by a lake shore, where thousands congregate, in cold weather, to enjoy the pleasant excitement of skating. It was on the ice that I first saw Alice, and a desire to see more of her induced me again to become proficient in an art that I excelled when a boy.

The afternoon on which the incident I am about to relate occurred, was unusually warm for the season, and many living on the borders of the lake were loud in their cautions to avoid the ice, as it looked as though weak in many places. I cared nothing for the warning of those who pretended to know more than myself. I regarded their advice with the utmost indifference, and while I was buckling on my skates I was overjoyed to see Alice leave her residence, as though desirous of an afternoon's sport upon the frozen surface of the lake. But I felt a pang of jealousy, fierce and bitter jealousy, when I noticed that the young man in whose company I had often seen her followed her to the lake, and buckled on her skates as though proud of the privilege. I saw them start for the best portion of the ice, and I watched her graceful figure until it was some distance from me, and then started in pursuit. I passed them like the wind, but was immediately recalled to the spot, where I had left Alice and

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her companion, by hearing a cry of terror. I turned, and saw that the man whom I so much envied was standing motionless and alone. I comprehended all at a glance. The ice had given way, and Alice had sunk beneath the surface of the water, perhaps never to rise again. In the space of ten seconds I was close upon the spot where she had disappeared.

"She has gone — she will be drowned!" yelled the young man, making the air vocal with his shouts; but he did not offer to plunge in and rescue the lady.

The cries were taken up on the shore, and I saw that the spectators were running in almost all directions, as though distracted at the catastrophe. I kicked off my skates, threw off my hat and coat, and with a plunge I went through the open space in search of death or a valuable life. I am a stout and bold swimmer, as all who follow the sea should be. For the first few seconds the water was so cold that it almost deprived me of motion; but I struggled against the chill which I felt creeping over me, and dove down until I reached the bottom; but still I did not obtain sight of Alice. I looked upward, and could see the light through the ice which had broken beneath her weight, and as there was no tide in the lake, I calculated that her form must be somewhere in my vicinity. I knew that I could remain under water but a few seconds, and feared that if I rose to the surface without the lady I was in search of, I should be unable, from exhaustion, to repeat my exploration. I strained my eyes as I swam, to discern her, and was just about to rise to the surface, when my hand struck against something, and the next instant was seized as by a death grip, and an attempt made to drag me towards the bottom. With a few energetic strokes of my feet and the disengaged hand I resisted the attempt to draw me down deeper, and succeeded in making my way towards the surface; but the struggles of my burden were fearful, and I was compelled to hold it at arm's length for the purpose of keeping one hand free. At length I reached the broken ice, and inhaled a breath of fresh air; and it was time that I did, for my head had begun to throb as though it would burst; but still I recollect hearing some one shout, —

"Have you got her?"

I think that the question revived me, and enabled my rash spirit to assert its sway, for I knew that the words came from her

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companion. I grasped the edge of the ice, but it was brittle and gave way. Still I was not discouraged, and again and again I essayed, until a firm hold was secured, and Alice's pale face was raised above the surface of the water, looking as though death had claimed its victim. There were then many people on the ice, for the accident had brought near us many sympathizers; but none of them dared to approach us, or lend assistance. I knew that Alice's life depended upon her speedy rescue, but I saw but faint prospects of such a deliverance as long as the crowd remained inactive. I could not raise her from the water without help, and it was very doubtful if I could even have saved myself without aid from those who stood near.

"Can we do anything for you?" some one shouted, who probably wanted to speak for the purpose of making himself conspicuous.

"Get ropes, or boards, or even a ladder, and lay it on the ice," I replied. "And if it is a possible thing, I wish you would hurry, for the water is chilly, and I fear for the lady."

"O, don't let her drown — save her at any rate, and I'll pay you for it," cried the weak-looking young man whom I have before alluded to, and whose name was George Evans.

"I've got a ladder at home!" one shouted.

"And I've got a rope that I think would be strong enough!" yelled a second.

"Then away with you, and bring them!" I cried; and the men started, after one long look at me and my burden.

I watched the men as they hurried off, but I had no hope that they would ever return in time. A moment later I heard the crowd cheer, and on looking up I saw four men advancing on the ice towards me, with a long ladder, which they had taken from an engine-house in the village, on the first alarm. The stout-hearted fellows came on at a run until they got where the ice looked treacherous, when they placed the ladder on the surface, and slid it along towards me, until one end was within my reach.

"Keep quiet until I come," one of the men said; and as he spoke he started for me, crawling on his stomach, so that his weight should be distributed over the largest possible surface, for fear of another fracture. "Now, then, give me your hand, my friend," the stranger said, "and I will pull you both out in no time."

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"Take the lady, and I will care for myself," I replied. "Here, grasp her hands firmly, and then retreat backward as fast as possible."

The stranger did as I directed. He gradually worked his way backward, and drew the inanimate body of Alice after him, until he reached a spot where the ice was strong, when he grasped her in his arms and ran towards the shore, followed by many of the spectators. I sought to raise my form from the water, but I was too cold and numb to move without assistance. I should have soon let go my hold upon the ladder, and sunk beneath the ice, had not the same man who carried Alice in his arms returned on a run, and come to my assistance.

"Why, the fools would let you freeze, and then cut you into square cakes, and sell you at a cent a pound in summer, I believe," the stranger said, crawling towards me.

I have a very distinct recollection of being drawn out of the water, and feeling very cold when the air touched my body; but nothing else do I remember until I awoke and found myself in bed, and a physician feeling my pulse.

"The young lady," I asked; "is she doing well?"

"Ah, excuse me; very unfortunately, I can't answer that question. She is attended by a practitioner of the old school. Now just open your mouth, and let me drop in a number six."

"My friend," I said, arresting his hand just as he was about to drop a globule in my mouth, "I have more need of rest than medicine. All that I now desire to learn is in relation to the safety of the lady. As soon as I hear I shall try and sleep, and that will restore me quicker than your number six."

"A mistake on your part," muttered the recommender of globules; but he saw that it was useless to argue with me; so a servant was despatched to my neighbor's for the purpose of ascertaining Alice's condition.

He brought me word that Alice had retired, and was likely to recover, and that Mr. Merton would take the first opportunity to wait upon me, and thank me for the services I had rendered his child. Then my perverse nature returned, for I disliked the thought of receiving compliments for the aid I had rendered. I gave orders that no one was to see me, and fell asleep, and dreamed of that pale face which, even in the chill water, I had so much admired. My sleep was troubled, for Alice's face dis-

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appeared, and in its place arose the hideous countenance of a native of Yorula, of Africa. I awoke with raging fever—a sickness that kept me confined to my bed for many days; and when I arose a note was placed in my hands. It was from Alice, who had entirely recovered from her accident, and wrote me that she was grateful, and should be happy to thank me in person, in company with her parents, whenever my strength would permit of the interview. She had sent every day of my sickness for information regarding my state. Much as I loved her, I could not return an answer to her note. Yet I kissed the lines which her hand had traced, and put the paper where I could feast my eyes upon it every day. No, I was resolved that I would not seek her company. Her parents might thrust their friendship upon me, and then they could blame none but themselves, if it was ever discovered that I was once a dealer in human flesh, and thrived by the slave traffic.

Some three weeks after I had read Alice's note, I was walking slowly through the streets of the village, having been to the post-office at the close of the day, when I accidentally met the lady in such a manner that to escape recognition was impossible. I bowed, and was about to pass on when she detained me.

"We have long sought for an opportunity to thank you for your courage in saving my life," she said, in a low tone; "but you have repelled all attempts on my part, and that of my parents. Will you let me express my gratitude now?"

"I do not need your thanks for the service that I rendered. Many would have done the same had I declined."

"That is somewhat doubtful," she said, with an arch smile; "for Mr. Evans says that he was so astonished, that he did not think that it was necessary he should dive in for the purpose of getting me out. Come, let us shake hands and be friends, as we are already neighbors. Are you willing, Mr. Ernest Robert?"

I could only kiss the fair hand that she extended, and promise compliance. From that time until the present we have been friends. Dare I hope for more?

Let me make a full confession of my past life, and see what the result will be.

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CHAPTER II.

HOW I SHIPPED IN A CLIPPER AND WAS DECEIVED. — WE CLEAR FOR SOME PORT AND CHEAT THE CUSTOM-HOUSE OFFICERS. — CAPTAIN MURPHY.

In the year 18— I had just returned from an East India voyage as second mate of a fast-sailing clipper ship. Disliking the usual dissipation which sailors indulge in on shore, I always made it a point to seek quarters far away from seamen's haunts and boarding-houses; and while I was recruiting from the fatigues of a passage home, I applied most of my leisure moments to making myself familiar with all the branches of navigation, and a thorough education. My success was commensurate with my application, and I have never yet had occasion to regret the time which I spent in so laudable a pursuit.

The Spanish and Portuguese languages I was partially familiar with; but I mastered them entirely by the aid of books, and they were of invaluable service to me during my career in the African trade.

One day a brother mate advised me to take a stroll to India Wharf some time, if I wished to see the most perfect specimen of a clipper topsail schooner that ever floated. His enthusiasm excited me, and the next afternoon I was rewarded by a view of the craft that had so challenged my friend's admiration. It was a vessel of about two hundred and fifty tons, with a bow like a steamboat's, it was so sharp, and a run that seemed as though incapable of drawing a bucketful of dead water after it in a twenty-four hours' cruise. The bulwarks were high, and resembled those of a brig of war, rather than a peaceful trader; while the masts were raking and of unusual length, for the purpose of giving an immense hoist to the foresail and mainsail, and, when before the wind, of spreading a huge square sail. I surveyed the masts and yards with a critical eye, and it seemed to me that the schooner must be crank; but a second glance at the beam dispelled that impression, and I candidly confessed to myself that if she did not sail, it would not be because her model was not good, or canvas lacking.

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Stores were being taken on board in a rapid manner, as though no time was to be lost; and while I stood on the dock, wondering what so many water casks were intended for, I accidentally overheard a conversation between parties whom I supposed to be owner and captain; and the sequel showed that my conjectures were right.

"I tell you, Murphy, the man is not fit for the voyage. Get another mate; and if you can't find one that suits you here, ship one at Havana that is all right, and knows what he's about."

The advice seemed to be offered by the owner of the schooner, whom I heard Captain Murphy call Mr. Bresley.

"You don't know the trouble I've had in making that man ship-shape, or you'd not advise me to leave him. He knows the coast and has been in the trade, and if he would only let alone splicing the main brace, I would not ask for a better man for our business."

"Well, well, I suppose that you've set your heart upon him; but it's impossible. He's got a touch of the yellow Jack, and don't know the main-boom from the jib-boom, or a doctor from a horse-marine. He will probably kick the bucket."

"When will Ruez be here?" the captain asked.

"I expect him to-morrow morning, with the Portuguese papers and the money from New York," was the answer.

"Then we can get away to-morrow, if I can find a mate that suits me," the captain remarked.

"Hang your mate! You seem to think that the schooner can't move without an officer," pettishly exclaimed the owner.

"By the time you have made as many voyages to the coast of —"

At this moment Mr. Bresley noticed that I was standing very near him; so he poked the captain in his ribs, to call his attention to the fact, and make him guard his speech. I had no suspicions then that the vessel was not intended for a fair and regular trader, but afterwards was astonished that I had not comprehended the drift, and thus refused to enter my name upon the shipping articles.

"A stout, active-built fellow," I heard Mr. Bresley say in a whisper.

"Looks as though he might know something — a lubber from a sailor," grunted the captain.

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"How do you know but he might suit you?" suggested the owner.

"Can't tell till I've taken a survey of his storage, and find out how his upper works are," Captain Murphy remarked.

"Sheer alongside, then, and I'll leave you to talk the matter over. If he's right, engage him, and don't mind a dollar extra per month. I rather like his face."

With this parting compliment the owner started up the wharf, and the captain lighted a fresh cigar, and drew near to the spot where I stood.

"A pretty craft, hey?" suggested the captain.

"I never saw one that suited me better," I replied.

"And I think that she will sail some, hey?" remarked the captain.

"Jam her on the wind, and if she don't show her stern to every thing that she meets, I shall feel that looks are deceptive," I replied.

"Them's my sentiments. But come on board and see her on deck and below. She is like a country lass, and will bear inspection."

I accepted the invitation, and found that the schooner was built in the most thorough manner, and that her cabin was a marvel of bird's-eye maple, gilt, and mahogany. There were four large state-rooms, besides the mate and second mate's room, which was convenient, but not very handsome. The more I saw of the craft, the stronger I felt that I should like to swing my hammock in her.

"What a splendid vessel for an opium clipper!" I said, at length.

"Ha! have you been in that trade?" the captain asked.

"I was six months in one, and made more money during that time than I ever made in a two years' voyage," I replied.

"You like money, then?" the captain asked, with a rapid glance of his cold gray eyes.

"Yes; not for the sake of hoarding, but for the many luxuries that it will purchase me, the position that I could gain, and the influence that I should have with it to back me."

"You are right, my boy; a man may have the larnin' of Blunt's Coast Pilot, yet, unless he has got money, he might as well be upon an island in the Pacific. A loblolly boy will pass for a navigator, if he has a cargo of gold in his pockets. Money

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moves the world, and men's hearts; and hang me if I don't wish that I had as much of it as would sink one of Uncle Sam's seventy-fours. I'd never show my nose on salt water again. I'm going to make some money, or I'll sink the schooner in the attempt."

I must have looked a little surprised, for the captain added hastily,—

"I mean that I'm going to work in a square manner—everything aboveboard, and no concealment. I may do a little smuggling, but you don't care about that, I suppose."

I was charmed with the captain's confidence, and had no hesitation in saying that I wouldn't mind doing a little at that myself, if the chance was possible.

"Then ship with me," the captain cried, bluntly. "My mate has got a touch of the yellow Jack, and won't be fit for duty for many days. I want a smart man to keep the men at work, and see that the sails are well trimmed. If you have sailed as second mate you will do for my turn; and if you don't like, we can part company at Havana."

"But where do you go from Havana?" I asked.

"Well, that is uncertain at the present time. It will depend upon the state of the weather."

After a brief thought I concluded to join the schooner. I had no time to spend idling. I agreed to have my traps on board before sundown, then received a month's advance wages in gold; not that I needed the money, but because I wished to leave it on shore, and let it accumulate during my absence. I had all my traps on board of the Coquette in time, and found that the stores were stowed away, the sails were bent, the crew on board, and, to my surprise, perfectly sober; but such a mixture of all nations I had never seen before. Italians, Portuguese, Spaniards, English, and three Americans constituted the precious company I was to associate with for a few months.

That night, to my surprise, Captain Murphy came on board about eleven o'clock, as I thought, about half seas over; or, in other words, he had been paying close attention to his grog rations. He woke me up, and ordered the schooner hauled into the stream and anchored. I could not devise the meaning of such a proceeding; but it was my place to obey, and not ask questions. The second mate, who seemed to be on good terms with the cap-

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tain, roused the men up; and to my further surprise, not one of them uttered a growl, or made a remark at being disturbed. They went to work like men, and without making the least noise the schooner was kedged to the stream where we dropped anchor, set an anchor watch, and then turned in, with the exception of the captain, who walked the deck in silence, stopping every few minutes to peer through the gloom, as though anxiously expecting the appearance of a boat with some one in it of consequence.

"Go turn in," the captain said, when he saw that I was disposed to remain on deck to keep him company. "Turn in. I will give you a call if you are wanted."

I went to sleep, and the next morning the first vessel that I saw when I went on deck was the revenue cutter Morris, lying almost within half a cable's length of us. I had noticed her the day before, when she was anchored in a different part of the harbor, and her sudden change of moorings was remarkable.

"The officers of the cutter seem pleased with our craft," I remarked to the captain. "I see that all of them have got their glasses directed to the vessel, as though admiring her proportions."

"Blast them," muttered the captain, in an undertone, "they are too lazy to do anything else but admire. I hope that they will keep their distance, and not throw obstructions in the way of our sailing."

"Why should they?" I asked. "If we have a regular clearance from the custom-house, the cutter won't interfere."

The captain made no reply, but walked to the other side of the deck, and gazed anxiously towards the shore, as though desirous of seeing some one whom he had long expected. Soon after breakfast I was somewhat astonished at receiving a visit from the cutter, in the shape of a boat's crew, with a lieutenant in command.

"I'm sorry to trouble you," the officer said, as he reached the deck, "but we have received orders to delay your sailing until your probable destination is more clearly defined. There is some dissatisfaction at the custom-house, which I suppose will be cleared up in a day or two."

Captain Murphy came on deck while the lieutenant was speaking, and heard the whole of the officer's conversation. Instead of looking indignant, as I supposed he would, his rough, weather-beaten face was wreathed in smiles. And while I am speaking

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of him I may as well give the reader a description of a man who landed more slaves upon the Island of Cuba than any person that was ever engaged in the trade. He was about fifty years of age, a native of England by birth, but had spent most of his life under the American flag. He was not over five feet six inches, but what he wanted in height he made up in breadth across his shoulders, which were perfectly prodigious, and indicated the immense strength that he really possessed. His face was inclined to redness, perhaps the effects of French brandy, which he had a fondness for, and it seemed to have settled in his nose in large lumps, like warts upon the human hands. His eyes were gray, and of a cold, glittering kind, not good to look upon; and when their owner was in a passion they seemed to turn black and flash like those of a snake. His hair was cropped close to his head, with the exception of two love locks, carefully combed just front of his ears, and the objects of his especial pride and tenderness. His legs were like two huge pedestals, which, through the fault of the architect, or some convulsion of nature, had assumed a convex form, and appeared as though likely to break off at any moment. His feet were as broad as they were long, and the sailors used to say that he had followed the sea so many years that he had become webfooted, like a duck; and when he walked the schooner's deck, his gait was not unlike that clumsy fowl. His voice was gruff, excepting when he desired to appear amiable, and then it was as soft as a woman's.

"You've come on board to admire my schooner?" the captain said, as though he did not divine the object of the officer's visit. "Examine her well, and then tell me if she won't make a good fruiter."

"She'd make a better slaver," replied the officer, carelessly, with a quick glance at Captain Murphy's face.

"Now, God forbid that craft of mine should ever be engaged in such business," was the pious exclamation of the captain. "I would sooner that she should sink in fathomless depths of the ocean than carry a negro to slavery."

"I am glad to hear you speak so, for there are rumors that the schooner was built and fitted for the African trade. Last night we had orders to watch you, and not let you sail without a clearance. My duty is a disagreeable one, but I must perform it."

"And I am the last man in the world that will blame you

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for that," was the hearty answer of Captain Murphy. "Here we are, and here we lie until all suspicion is removed, even if the schooner grounds upon the beef bones that we throw over the side."

"Then you have no objection to my overhauling your cargo?" the officer asked, charmed with the captain's frankness.

"None in the world. Set your men at work, if you please. You'll find nothing but lumber and cask shooks, which we are taking as freight to Havana. But first come into the cabin and take a glass of wine with me, and then to business."

The invitation was accepted; but when the cutter's officer next made his appearance, his face showed that the wine had mounted to his head and confused his senses.

"Remember, captain," he said, as he tumbled over the side into the boat, "that you must not start until you get orders."

"Of course not — that is understood by us," was the reply; and then, as the boat was pushed off, Captain Murphy muttered, "If the wind is fair and the night dark, you'll miss me by morning."

In the course of the forenoon a boat came alongside with the long-expected supercargo, Guy Ruez, a Portuguese of the most grotesque appearance. He was thin, bilious, and looked to be at least sixty years of age; but he was only forty. He had been engaged in the slave trade all of his lifetime, and knew every port and every trick that was played upon the coast of Africa. He was not a bold man by any means, but he was cunning, and depended upon his friend Captain Murphy to do the fighting in case his loud talk should produce a collision, as it sometimes did; for if Guy Ruez was not courageous, he had a spiteful tongue.

The supercargo brought with him three bags, which, by the weight, I knew contained gold.

"You see," says Guy, opening one of the bags, and exhibiting a handful of doubloons, "if the cutter takes us in charge, her officers will make considerable prize money, perhaps. How the lazy rascals would flutter if they could only get a glimpse of these yellow boys! But they never will. Not a dollar of this money will they ever see, for I know how to prevent it."

"May I ask how?" I said.

"You are a new man in the service, and I don't know whether

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you are to be trusted," he replied, with a grin that showed his yellow fangs to the greatest disadvantage.

"As you please," I answered, and was turning away, when he stopped me.

"Here! I know you ain't a rascal, like some of the Yankees. I will show you, because I may need your services."

He hastily untied the bags, and pulled from each a fine white silk line, with a cork secured at one end, while the other was fastened to the bags.

"Do you understand," he said. "I throw the bags overboard and they sink, but the corks no sink. They float, and no one take notice. No one see the lines, 'cos they same color as the water. By and by, after cutter gone, come off in boat, and get the money. Very good, hey?"

We did not receive another visit from the people of the cutter until sundown, and then it was to inform us that orders had been received from the shore not to permit our sailing during the night, as matters were not yet clear at the custom-house; and a hint was added, that perhaps we should have to submit to an overhauling at the dock, for the purpose of scrutinizing our cargo. But no sooner had the boat pushed off, than Captain Murphy called me to him.

"We shall leave the harbor to-night at any rate. We must steal past the cutter, and be outside of Cape Cod by daylight."

"With all my heart," I replied; "but how are we to escape the eyes of the cutter people?"

"That I will show you by and by. Get everything ready for sea, and have a kedge on deck with fifty fathoms of line. When the time arrives for work, I will give the orders."

I waited patiently till about six bells, when the flood tide made, and the two vessels were separated, so that it was difficult to discern the cutter through the gloom. The wind was north'rd and west'rd, which was just the breeze to take us out of the harbor if we could start without an alarm; and if we once got sail on, I had no doubt that, in defiance of the cutter, we should make our escape, for the Morris was a slow tub.

"Now lower a boat, and run a kedge out to the north'rd as far as the line will go," was the first order that I received from the captain.

The boat was dropped into the water without the slightest

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noise, and pulled in the direction indicated. As soon as this was done, we slipped the cable by which we were riding, and hauled in on the line, and in an imperceptible manner gradually increased our distance from the cutter. Twice we sent the boat out, and at length found ourselves close upon the East Boston side, and nearly half a mile distant from our sleepy but suspicious friend.

"Up with the kedge, and cast the gaskets from the sails," cried Captain Murphy, when he saw that no notice was taken of our movements.

The men sprang to obey his orders, yet without the least noise or confusion. The jib, foresail, and mainsail were set, and with a fair and stiff breeze we steered for the outer harbor. The schooner was kept well over on the East Boston side, even hugging the flats so closely that we could have jumped ashore with dry feet had we desired, until we were abeam of the cutter, when we could just see her, with a light set at the stern, and one at the bow. There was no movement on board, and if we could gain two more cable lengths, we should be safe from pursuit; for I had no doubt we could sail two feet to the cutter's one. Still it was a trying moment, and not until we gradually left the cutter far astern, did we breathe as though our escape was certain.

"Now, then, pile on the canvas, Mr. Robert," the captain said, as he and the Portuguese opened a bottle of wine, and drank success to the Coquette.

"We have no pilot on board," I said, fearing that he would run the schooner on shore in his recklessness.

"I'm the pilot, and a good one, too, as you shall confess before daylight. Steward, bring me a glass of grog and some cigars, forward, and don't let there be a sound on deck except my orders to the man at the wheel. Mr. Robert, attend to the sails, and I'll keep the Coquette in deep water. Ha! what was that?"

We were just off Fort Independence when he spoke.

"It's a rocket from the cutter. They have discovered our escape, and want to see in what direction we have gone," I replied.

"Yes; and there goes a blue light. Burn your fireworks if you want to. It's little use at this late hour, I can tell you."

The cutter continued to throw up rockets for half an hour. By that time we were outside of Boston lower light, and dashing

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through the water at the rate of ten miles per hour, with every sail set, and a stiff breeze blowing on our quarter.

"Set the watches, and keep her as she goes until four o'clock," the captain said to me. "Call me at three, unless some change takes place. Keep a bright lookout, and don't carry sail too long, for the rigging is new and stretches."

And with these comprehensive orders the captain edged his way into the cabin, and turned in. His shoulders were too broad for him to enter in a square manner, or else the door was too narrow. At daylight nothing was to be seen.

Nothing occurred on our passage to Havana that was worthy of note. The true character of the vessel was not made known to me, although frequently the supercargo and captain spoke of the money that was to be made in the slave trade, and how much they would like to engage in it. I must confess that at length I did not feel that repugnance to the business which I had first experienced, and that I was not shocked by the yarns which the captain and supercargo spun regarding their adventures. They told of ivory tushes of the elephant and palm oil that could be bought for a song, and then incidentally alluded to the shipment of a few negroes for the purpose of completing a cargo, and the amount of money they would bring in Cuba.

"What say you?" the captain remarked, one afternoon, the day before we entered Havana. "Shall we make a trip to Africa in case we find business dull at the island, and try our luck? Will you join us, and share in every nigger that we land?"

I shook my head, feebly I must confess, but still I refused.

"As you please," the captain remarked. "We can find some one not quite so scrupulous as you. What you lose we shall gain; that is certain. There's money to be made in the business."

The next day we made the island, and passed Moro Castle without the customary challenge, which I supposed was an oversight on the part of those at the fort; but I was afterwards informed that the officers of the fort never molested a vessel that was suspected of being engaged in the slave trade, and for their consideration received a certain amount of money that was very acceptable.

Three days after we anchored we were boarded by a boat from the British man-of-war Serpent, which was laying "off and on"

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outside. The officer pretended that a glass of water was desired, but I saw by his keen glances his visit was not one for refreshment, but curiosity. He scanned the deck and masts, and hoists of the sails, with critical eyes, and for the purpose of prolonging his visit, politely asked for a second glass of water.

"There is no occasion for your flooding your insides with tepid water," I said, somewhat amused at his excuse. "The sailing qualities of the schooner are probably of more importance just now than a glass of water. If you are pleased with the looks of the Coquette, or wish to examine her at your leisure, you are welcome to do so."

"I see that you have suspected the object of my visit," he answered, good-humoredly. "We heard of you outside, and I was sent in to see if report did not exaggerate your good looks. But for once rumor has not done you justice. This is the handsomest specimen of marine architecture that I ever saw, and how I shall regret to see her broken up!"

"I hope that day is far distant," I replied.

"I hope so; but if she is intended for the trade, Her Britannic Majesty's sloop Serpent will have the honor of making a prize, for in spite of your model we can outsail you, on the wind, or off."

"She is not intended for the trade," I replied, in all seriousness; "but if she was, the keel has not yet been laid in the British dockyards that can sail with us in a wholesale breeze on the wind, or two points free."

The Englishman laughed as though he did not believe my boast.

"In the first place," he replied, "Captain Murphy never commanded anything but slavers; and in the second place, when he left the coast, some nine months since, he boldly boasted in my presence that he should return with a clipper that would trouble the Serpent on every point of sailing. I know the man better than you; for, if I am not mistaken, you have yet to make your first voyage to the coast of Africa. But we shall see which vessel sails the fastest; for tell Murphy that a good lookout will be kept for him, and that he has been too lucky all his life not to meet with reverses. We shall pick him up, for our fleet is large and vigilant. But I hope our luck will bring us in contact with the schooner."

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That night, when Captain Murphy and Guy Ruez came on board, I told them of the visit; at which information both looked somewhat serious, and whispered together for some moments, and the result of the conference was a desire to see me in the cabin.

"Mr. Robert," the captain said, "we find that our expectations of obtaining a cargo are knocked flat aback, and that we have got to fish away at something else to turn an honest penny, and make a living. We have had an offer to make a trip to Africa for ivory and niggers; and if you want to go, just say the word in ship-shape fashion, and we'll count you in. Is it a bargain?"

"A hundred dollars a month, and ten dollars for every slave that is landed," chimed in the Portuguese.

I was on the point of refusing, but the supercargo unlocked a trunk and threw a bag of doubloons upon the table. I hesitated for a moment; but the Portuguese, who knew what was passing in my heart as well as myself, hastened to speak.

"We have been so well satisfied with your conduct that we give you twelve doubloons, exclusive of your wages. You see that we pay well, for we have money in abundance.'

"But if we are captured?" I suggested.

"If such a thing occurs, we can buy our freedom with gold. Agents will be near us in case anything happens; and I need not tell you that Englishmen love gold as well as Yankees."

"But if we should be captured by an American man-of-war?" I suggested.

The captain and Guy looked at each other and laughed.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing, Guy?" the former demanded.

"Never," answered the Portuguese, "and never expect to."

"Will the crew consent to go?" I asked, the gold tempting me, and my abhorrence of the traffic gradually giving way.

"They go? Call them aft, and see."

I passed the word for the crew to muster aft.

"Well, men, who's for nigger-hunting?" Captain Murphy asked.

There was a unanimous shout in the affirmative.

"Very well. Go forward, and to-morrow you shall have twenty-four hours' liberty to spend your advance wages."

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And the men went, looking as contented as though about to be discharged with several hundred dollars in their lockers for a general blow-out.

"Now what do you say?" demanded the captain. "Shall we continue to swing our hammocks in the same craft, or shall we square yards and separate?"

"I will try one voyage," I said, "and if I don't like it, we can part company, and no harm done."

The next morning the Spanish flag fluttered from the schooner's mast-head. The crew were allowed to go on shore, and I took a short ramble there myself, and was introduced to many influential men who were largely interested in the slave traffic.

"You are going to the Gabun, I understand," one old man said to me. "If such is the case, tell old Cringy that he is a scoundrel, and that his last cargo was the meanest that I ever received."

I had no idea who Cringy was, but I promised to convey the message if it was not a dangerous one.

The next day we were all on board, taking in fresh provisions, and the day after weighed anchor, and shaped our course for the River Gabun, on the west coast of Africa.

We had fair winds and plenty of them, and the Coquette bounded over the waves like a race-horse over a trotting course, until we made one of the spurs of the Moon range of mountains, when we hauled our wind and steered for Gabun, at that time one of the most noted slave towns on the coast of Southern Africa. When we were five miles from the mouth of the river, we discovered a canoe coming towards us, paddled by half a dozen negroes, naked, with the exception of a piece of white cloth tied around their waist. But the person who steered the canoe and was seated in the stern-sheets was dressed entirely different from his companions. He had on a cocked hat with a huge red feather, a blue cloth coat with bright brass buttons, epaulets of the largest size, and a sword by his side.

"Here comes Cringy — the old humpback scoundrel has not yet gone to Davy Jones's locker," Captain Murphy said, examining the canoe and contents through his glass. "He is dressed in his state costume, which is a sure sign that there are no cruisers about. Cringy is a weather-cock, and by his rig one can tell how the land lays."

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"The canoe is close aboard of us. Shall we heave to, and let it come alongside?"

"No, indeed; that is a piece of politeness that would make the blasted niggers have too good an opinion of themselves."

The negroes were excellent boatmen, and although we were moving at the rate of six knots an hour, the canoe glided alongside without the slightest difficulty; and in a few moments over the rail came the most singular looking specimen of humanity that I had ever seen. He was an old negro, humpbacked, thin- and all drawn out of shape, apparently; the upper part of his body was dressed in uniform, but the lower part was entirely naked, with the exception of the usual piece of white cloth around his waist.

"Well, Cringy, I am glad that you are still alive," Captain Murphy said, without manifesting the least cordiality.

"Ah, cap'n, I glad to see you. You no be here 'fore for one year. I s'pose you took by dem Englishmen."

"Any cruisers around, Cringy?" the captain asked.

"One here yesterday — de Buzzard — but go 'way for Cape Lopez, and no come back for month or two."

"Got any niggers to sell cheap?"

"O, very few and very high. No plenty. No come in at all now."

"It's no use to run into the Gabun, if that is the case," the captain said. "We can run down to Magumba, and get a cargo without trouble. Good by, Cringy, and try and do better the next time I call. Put your wheel up," the captain shouted to the helmsman; "ease off the main sheet;" and round we went like a top, and stood off from the land, as though really bound for Magumba.

Cringy watched the operation of wearing ship without the slightest appearance of disappointment. But when he saw that the schooner was really headed to clear Cape Negro, and that the sails were trimmed, and the ropes coiled down as though not to be disturbed for some time, his philosophy forsook him. He glanced towards the captain and Ruez, but they paid not the slightest attention to him. They were drinking grog and smoking cigars on the weather side of the quarter-deck. Cringy looked towards the land, which was fast receding, and then at the two who were enjoying themselves upon the other side of the deck

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He wavered, and at last yielded. He crossed the deck, and addressed the captain, —

"Captain, what you go for?"

"For a cargo, Cringy, at cheap rates."

"Lordy, you don't want to ruin dis nigger — does you?"

"No; and we don't mean that you shall ruin us, Cringy. We can buy slaves cheaper than you sell them."

"No; I sell less than udder men. How much you gib for tree hundred fat niggers? All well, all Pangives. Clever — no fight — no sulk — all like go on water. No die. How much you give?"

"Twenty dollars apiece — pay in muskets, powder, lead, cloth, and money," the supercargo answered, promptly.

"O, crackee; dat no pay me. Gib me thirty dollars, and I put 'em aboard. Dat cheap for 'em. All fat."

"Twenty dollars — no more," was the very cool reply.

Cringy thought a moment, and glanced towards the land, which was nearly ten miles distant.

"You gib me present?" he asked.

"Yes; and one for your first wife."

"Den I sell tree hundred niggers at twenty dollars apiece, and you got darned good bargain. I lose money."

"Now you begin to talk. Drink a glass of grog, and swear by your fetich that you will act fair and honorable, or suffer persecution from witchcraft, and we will visit Gabun."

Cringy did not like the oath, for the natives of Africa have a great dread of witchcraft; but he drank the liquor, and took the vow required. There was no fear of trusting him after swearing to the oath; for the old fellow was much more fearful of devils than mortals, and not even the love of gold could have induced him to break his word, much as he would have desired to. He was as affable and polite as a Frenchman after a good dinner, and for his condescension got several stiff glasses of grog; and by the time he had finished the last one, the mouth of the river was in sight, and the negro's services were required to pilot us over the bar, which is formed between the headlands, and requires some knowledge to cross.

"Come, Cringy," said Murphy, removing the liquor, "you have bowsed up your jib enough for one day. Take us over the bar, and you shall have a bottle of brandy for your wives."

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"Rum no good for women," replied the fellow. "Make 'em quarrel and fight. Me drink all, and den no fight."

"Well, pilot us over the bar, and you shall have a bottle."

"No, sar; I do no such ting widout money. My price five dollars. Dat what man-of-war men gibs me. I no work for less."

As the schooner was close upon the bar, Murphy was compelled to yield to his demand, and that was the first attempt of Cringy to get square.

The town did not present a very imposing appearance, consisting, as it did, of a few hundred huts, scattered over the plain and on the bluff; but the small number of houses was more than made amends for by the numerous inhabitants who thronged the beach and launched canoes upon the water for the purpose of boarding us. They crowded around the vessel, and held up tempting displays of fruit for the purpose of inducing us to trade; and I must confess that I was anxious for a little barter in that line, but Cringy interfered.

"Go away, you cussed lazy niggers," the old fellow shouted, mounting the taffrail, and shaking his hat and fists at the eager natives. "Dis vessel mine — I supply her wid eberyting. De captain no want what you got. All stale wegetables dat you got. De captain know you and your tricks. Go 'way and look arter your wives, for white man goin' on shore presently."

Whether this threat had the effect of dispersing the canoe-men, or whether they considered it hopeless to contend with a man of Cringy's abilities, I don't know; but the negroes, with grunts of dissatisfaction, paddled for the shore. But, if Cringy did monopolize the trade of the schooner in regard to provisions and fruit, he kept us well supplied, for he sent on board a canoe-load of oranges and bananas and vegetables in profusion.

The next day we hired twenty natives to come on board, and commenced breaking out the hold and landing cases of muskets, and kegs of powder, and lead, besides boxes of white chalk, beads, and various trinkets which would be likely to please not only the Africans on the coast, but those in the interior. The supercargo and old Cringy were the most active men to be seen during the time that the cargo was discharging. Everything was sent to the latter's warehouse, a long building that was made of palm trees, and thatched over to keep out the rain. After the cargo

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was discharged we commenced filling our water casks and stowing them, and then began to lay the slave deck, which reposed upon the casks; yet the latter could be got at any time during the passage when water was required.

While we were laying the slave deck — which had been built and fitted in Boston, and then taken apart for future use — a signal was given from the bluff that a sail was in sight, and that the stranger was standing towards the mouth of the river. The slave deck would have condemned us without judge or jury. But Cringy and the supercargo were equal to the emergency. In less than half an hour the deck was torn up, thrown overboard, and towed on shore by the numerous canoes which Cringy had at his disposal. The instant the boards touched the beach they were taken to the woods and concealed, and there was no fear that the natives would reveal the secret, or even hint at our true character, for their prosperity in those days depended entirely upon the slave traffic.

By the time the boards were stowed away Cringy jumped into his canoe, and was ready to go outside of the bar, and offer his services as a pilot. Just as he was ready to shove off we heard the report of a gun.

"Ah, dat English man-of-war I know," the old fellow cried. "Now, I go off and get five dollars, and humbug John Bull, you see."

And we did see the Serpent enter the harbor in half an hour's time, and drop anchor about two cable lengths from the schooner. No sooner were the sails furled than a boat was lowered, and a lieutenant, the same one who had visited us at Havana, came on board. He was received by Guy Ruez in the most polite manner, while Captain Murphy remained in the background.

"Who is the master of this schooner?" the Englishman said, after a slight nod to me.

"I have the honor," the supercargo answered.

"And what is your business here?" was the next question.

"Trade," was the laconic answer.

"In niggers?" was the abrupt question.

"No, sir; I hope that we have not yet got to that. We are in search of palm oil and ivory."

"Will you let me look at your papers?"

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I expected that the Portuguese would be staggered by this demand, but he was not. He led the way into the cabin, and I saw him produce bottles and a box of papers.

"Your papers are right, but I should like a look at the schooner's hold," the lieutenant said, at length.

"The hatches are off; examine at your leisure," was the answer.

The officer came on deck. Then he called three of his men, and went into the hold.

"What are all these casks for?" he asked, looking up to those on deck.

"To hold palm oil. We can't carry it in bulk," replied Ruez.

The officer colored, and continued his investigations.

"These guns are for the same purpose, I suppose," he said, calling our attention to six nine-pounders, and a long brass thirty-two, which were stowed away near the pumps.

"Ballast, sir, ballast—nothing more," the supercargo answered, smiling sweetly.

The lieutenant continued his explorations for some time, but at length, finding nothing that could be used against us, came on deck.

"We shall be here for some weeks," he said, just as he was leaving the side of the vessel; "and be assured that we shall keep an eye on you and your doings."

The boat was pushed off, and rowed back to the Serpent

"Blast his impudence," muttered Murphy; "how I should like to sink his old tub where she lies, and drown every soul on board! They don't like to see an honest man make a decent living."

But the Englishman was determined to carry out his threat, and remain at anchor for the purpose of watching our movements, and prevent us from shipping slaves. Day after day passed, and still the Serpent showed no signs of crawling out of the harbor; but the supercargo and Murphy manifested no impatience. Once in a while the Englishman would send a boat on board of us, take a general survey, and then retire, satisfied or dissatisfied, it was impossible to tell which by the men's looks.

One morning, when Cringy came on board to bring our daily supply of fruit, he informed us that a native had been accused of stealing sheep, and that he was to be "tested" at ten o'clock in the village. A few questions enlightened me in regard to the

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meaning of the word "tested" or "*kalahalo*," as the natives call the exhibition. The thief had denied his guilt, and demanded a trial by means of the "*kalahalo*," to prove his innocence. This appeal had to be allowed, as the Africans are so superstitious that they believe a person after death has the power to trouble with witchcraft all who oppose his plea for the test, and if the criminal can come forth unscathed by the ordeal, he is declared innocent, and allowed to escape without further punishment.

The sheep-stealer was to be tested with boiling oil, into a caldron of which he was to thrust his naked arm up to the shoulder, and then slowly withdraw it. If he uttered no cries of pain he was innocent; but if he even whimpered with agony, his death was certain and immediate at the hands of the crowd. I had no trouble in obtaining leave of absence, and even Murphy, who was tired of doing nothing but swilling at a brandy bottle, agreed to go with me.

CHAPTER III.

A TEST CASE. — A SHEEP-STEALER'S DEATH. — MONKEYS AND THEIR ENEMIES. — A NOVEL BATTLE. — KING GEORGE'S TOWN.

CRINGY was an authority in the town, and although not generally respected for his honesty, was regarded for his wealth and importance in the commercial world. Therefore, when Cringy appeared upon the ground, the natives made way for him and his company, and allowed us to take up positions close to the spot where the test was to be applied. A large pot filled with palm oil was placed over a fire in front of the hut where the prisoner was confined, and already the liquid was bubbling and boiling as though impatient for its victim. Suddenly, a wild, discordant sound of music arose from the village musicians. Their instruments consisted of reeds and drums of the primitive kind, but they were beaten without regard to time or tune. Finally the musicians ceased their labors, and then the crowd set up a yell that would have done honor to a tribe of Indians of the wildest description.

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"Now dey bring de sheep-stealer out," Cringy said to me.

"But will the man really put his arm in the oil?" I asked.

"Sartin true."

"But the oil will burn the flesh from the bone," I said.

"Don't know," replied Cringy, with a shake of his white head. "S'pose his fetich say no burn, be all right."

"But if he does get burned, what then?"

"Then he be cussed rascal, and we kill him."

Just at that moment the door of the hut was thrown open, and the music recommenced its most dismal lamentations. The crowd gave yell after yell as an accompaniment, and the natives swayed to and fro, all eager to catch sight of the prisoner. The poor wretch did not manifest the least sign of fear or hesitancy. He seemed to have nerved himself for the ordeal before him, and walked with a firm step towards the fire. But Cringy's eyes, more sharp than mine, detected the cause of the courage at a glance.

"Ah, de blasted scoundrel!" he muttered; "he eat de *kalo*."

The *kalo* root is capable of stupefying the senses, in the same manner that opium does. It is a powerful drug, and an overdose is certain death.

Cringy looked disappointed when he detected the man's condition, for he feared that he could not revel in the thief's expressions of agony, and then see him knocked on the head.

"Ah, de d—d scoundrel—he cheat us, arter all. Me own sheep;" and the latter part of his remarks showed the secret of his antipathy.

When the culprit was within a fathom of the boiling oil, a huge, stalwart fellow, whom Captain Murphy pronounced worth at least eight hundred dollars, landed in Havana, made a proclamation setting forth the prisoner's crime, and his confidence of innocence; that to prove the latter, he had consented to submit to the test; and that the people were to judge by his actions whether he was to be acquitted or condemned. And the people, as in all countries, whether inhabited by whites or blacks, were extremely pleased at the idea of acting as judge and jury. Once again the music recommenced its discordant noise, and the prisoner was pushed towards the fire. He hesitated for a moment, as he looked at the bubbling oil; but the guard of negroes said something, and grinding his teeth together to prevent all expressions of pain, the

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sheep-stealer plunged his arm into the kettle; but the agony was too great for even drugs to deaden. With a wild yell of pain the poor wretch withdrew his limb, and danced around the open space that was left him, his face expressing all the horrors that he suffered.

"Is he guilty?" asked the huge negro before alluded to, appealing to the crowd, and speaking in his native language.

"Kill him!" was the cry; and hardly were the words uttered, before half a dozen clubs fell upon the fellow's head with force enough to have crushed the skull of an ox.

"Ah," muttered Cringy, with a sigh of relief, "de blame rascal no teal sheeps more. Me berry glad dat he be killed. He great humbug."

As the exhibition was over, we accepted Cringy's escort through the crowd, and gained the Coquette in safety. To pay our cicerone for his trouble, we gave Cringy a bottle of rum, for which he seemed very grateful, and just before departing made a proposition that I gladly accepted.

"To-morrow," he said, "I go to King George's town, thirty miles up de river. Grand elephant hunt up dare day arter to-morrow. Drive 'em in pen, and den kill 'em. Lots o' fun; s'pose you in big tree; you no get hurt. You go?"

I readily got permission to leave the vessel, and even Murphy decided that he would like the trip for the sake of passing away time. We spent the evening in cleaning our revolvers and rifles, and getting ready for an early start. Murphy had thought that it was best to go well armed, in case the people of King George's town should prove hostile, or take a fancy to any of our clothing while we were absent from Cringy's side, for it was generally understood that the king's people were not over particular in what they stole, or whom they stole from. The next day, an hour before sunrise, Cringy came alongside with his bark canoe, paddled by four blacks, who were stripped to their waist like their brethren on shore. The canoe was large, and the portion we occupied was completely screened from the sun by grass cloth, of native manufacture. We put on board a few bottles of rum for the king and chiefs, and a case of claret for ourselves, and added a keg of tobacco as the next most acceptable present for our darky friends, and then shoved into the stream, the negroes accompanying their rowing with a wild, monotonous song, that

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sounded very well for the first quarter of the way. In half an hour's time, we had left the town far astern of us, and were pulling through a wilderness. The river ran between high banks, a portion of the distance to the King George's village, each of which was lined with rank vegetation, and trees of the palm species, some of them of the largest size. Every few moments we would come upon a troop of monkeys, grinning and skylarking amid the trees, and chatting shrilly, as though defying us to harm them. We considered them unworthy our ammunition, and our silence emboldened the black rascals to follow us along the river, which they could do very easily by jumping from tree to tree. We encouraged them to continue in pursuit by insulting gestures, which the imps were not slow to return with interest; and at length they grew so enraged that they plucked boughs from the trees and hurled them at us, and showed their long teeth with most malicious looks. Suddenly the troop uttered a frightful yell, but it sounded to me more like a cry of terror than of anger. I saw a stately palm sway to and fro, as though agitated by the wind, yet there was not a breath of air stirring on the river, and I was at a loss how to account for it. There was a sudden squawk, and hundreds of monkeys could be seen leaving the tree with leaps of the most astonishing description.

"Now you see fun," muttered Cringy. "Big snake in de tree. Grab monkey and eat 'em. Wait a leetle bit."

The natives stopped rowing, and watched the tree with keen eyes. After a few moments' silence the palm was again agitated, and through the leaves we could see the gyrations of a huge serpent, which had captured one of the monkeys for a breakfast, and was about to secure a good, easy position for the purpose of swallowing its prey at leisure. Once or twice the monster's head was thrust through an opening, and we could see that the monkey even then was struggling to escape from the fangs of the boa.

"Dat good chance for a shot," Cringy suggested, motioning his dusky companions to keep the canoe opposite the tree, and not let it drift down stream with the tide. "S'pose you hit 'em, if you can. Yankee say dat dey be smart wid de rifle."

"Hit thunder!" grunted Murphy, who had been making sad havoc with the claret during the passage.

"P'aps you hit 'em," Cringy said, addressing me with a grin upon his cunning face.

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"I can hit him from here, if you will keep the canoe steady," I replied, calmly.

"Blast me if I won't bet on it," the captain said.

"I take de bet — what shall it be?" Cringy asked.

"Fifty dollars against a fifty pound tusk," Murphy replied.

"I take dat bet," the negro said, quite coolly, "and I win de moneys, too."

"Perhaps," Murphy cried, lighting a cigar, and motioning me to do my best.

The natives, who were as anxious for the sport as myself, paddled the canoe as close to the tree as it was prudent to do, and then remained perfectly quiet, awaiting my shot. They did not have to wait long, for the boa, in its restlessness, was continually moving its head and a portion of its body through openings, and it was during one of these moments' that I took a careful aim and fired. The tree was shaken as though a hurricane was passing through its branches, and the next instant the head of the boa, with only the tail and hind legs of the monkey, was exposed to our view, and swinging and surging towards the water, as though desirous of disengaging its prey from a distended mouth.

"I've won the bet!" shouted Murphy.

"By dam, I dink you have," muttered Cringy, a shade of disappointment passing over his withered face.

Just at that moment the boa's head reached the surface of the river, and beat the water to a foam in its agony. We watched the scene with some interest, and while we were thus occupied, Cringy touched me on my shoulder, and pointed with his lean finger up the river.

"Ah, now you see fun," he said, with a grin of satisfaction.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Alligator cum down de riber to see what de noise all 'bout. Hab a grand fight, and we no care which lick."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"Dare — you no see?"

"I see nothing but an old log floating down stream," I replied.

"Dat no log — dat alligator. Eat nigger for breakfast, and want more."

We were not left long in suspense, for the animal, without any perceptible movement, suddenly sank, and when it rose to the

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surface it was close to the head of the snake, which still continued its struggles and gyrations, greatly to the delight of the monkeys, which still kept their positions on the trees, and chatted unceasingly.

"Now for de cussed'st fight dat you ever did see," cried Cringy; and just as he spoke the alligator made a sudden, clumsy lurch for the snake's neck, seized it in its ponderous jaws, and seemed to make its teeth meet through and through bones, muscle, and flesh. The tree was shaken more fiercely than ever, but it was the movement of the boa in getting a firm position with its tail, before commencing the fight in earnest.

At the first movement the monkey was disgorged, and floated down the stream, so crushed out of shape that its own family would not have recognized it. But it was not suffered to drift far, for a dark head made its appearance, and with one loud snap huge jaws closed upon the dead body, and it was dragged to the bed of the river to be devoured at leisure. The fight between the alligator and the boa now demanded our whole attention, and amply repaid us for the time consumed in witnessing it. The denizen of the river, still grasping the snake's head between its ponderous jaws, attempted to sink to the bottom, and did succeed in settling down half a fathom; but the snake, with a powerful jerk, once more gained the surface of the water, and even raised the body of the alligator a few feet clear of the river: the next instant both fell with a crash that sent the foam flying in all directions, and for a few seconds the water was so agitated that we could not distinguish the combatants. When the smoke of the battle had cleared away a little, I observed that the boa was seeking to draw its foe to the shore, where the fight would have been conducted on more equal terms; but to this arrangement the alligator objected with all its power, and attempted to make short work of the business by lashing out with its powerful tail, and each blow that was struck seemed capable of prostrating a tree, if one had stood in its way. But, unfortunately, the alligator could not retain its hold with its teeth and use its chief weapon for attack at the same time; so every blow fell short, and while they did not injure the snake, they served to weaken the alligator. The latter was slowly drawn towards the shore, yet there was no intention manifested to relinquish its powerful hold, and quit the companionship of so powerful an enemy.

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The snake made many attempts to use its huge jaws upon the scaly hide of its antagonist, but was not successful until the river monster touched the land, when the latter suddenly relinquished its hold for the purpose of escaping to the water; but it was too late. The boa suddenly extended its enormous jaws, and with a motion quick as lightning seized the alligator by one of its flippers, and with one jerk threw it many feet up the bank. The alligator again made an attempt to reach the water, and seemed no longer desirous of continuing the fight; but the boa was not to be shaken off in that manner. It uncoiled its powerful tail, and took three or four turns around the body of its foe, and then dragged it towards the trunk of a tree, around which coil after coil was thrown, each one gradually increasing in intensity, until we could hear the bones of the black monster crack, and could see the blood spurt from under its scales and dye the slimy body a crimson hue.

"Dat cuss dead, sure," grunted Cringy, with a satisfied look. "Now s'pose you kill t'other one, 'fore he cackle too much at his luck."

I had loaded my rifle during the fight, and was not adverse to once more showing my skill as a marksman. I took a good aim at the head of the boa, and fired. The eyes, which but a moment before were like living coals of fire, lost their fierceness, and the head of the boa fell until it touched the ground. The coils around the tree and the alligator were gradually relaxed, and all movements ceased. The snake and its opponent were both dead.

We saw many species of wild animals while going up the river, and I got two or three very fair shots at tigers; but the distance was too great for serious effect. At eleven o'clock we came in sight of the village, which looked very pretty, nestled in between thick groves of palms and red wood. As we neared the town, I saw a dozen or twenty persons dressed in white pants and blue dungaree jackets, somewhat the worse for wear. Those thus clothed were armed with muskets, which they seemed to carry with considerable pride, and to keep at a distance from the half-naked rabble, which were squatting upon their hams and chatting like so many monkeys, regarding our visit and its object.

"You see dose sogers in de uniform?" Cringy asked, pointing to the landing with evident pride.

"Yes — who are they?"

"Dem de king's wives. Dey fight like de deble, when 'em

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mad up. Kill ebery ding dat comes afore 'em. You must be 'tickler when you speak to 'em, and no laugh. Dey no ding nothing of shooting man. King like 'em bery much."

When we were eight fathoms from the landing-place, one of the female soldiers presented her musket and hailed.

"*Kala hilo!*" she cried, which Cringy said was an order to stop where we were without delay, and our oarsmen were not slow to do so.

"Where do you come from, and what do you wish?" were the next questions addressed in the peculiar dialect of the village, and which Cringy interpreted for us.

"We are traders," shouted Cringy, "desirous of purchasing, and to show our good will, have brought many presents for the king."

"Then wait until the king's commands arrive, before you land," replied the soldier; and she sent off one of her companions to carry the news to his dusky majesty.

In a few minutes the messengers returned with the information that we could land and visit his majesty, and bring our presents with us. A procession was formed, and we were escorted to the quarters of the king, several natives bringing up the rear with the liquor and tobacco, which I saw was eyed with wishful glances by the dusky throng; but not one of them was bold enough to lay a hand upon that which belonged to or was intended for the king.

His majesty was housed in the best building in the village. It was enclosed with mud walls, eight feet high and two feet thick, which were intended as a protection in case of an attack and insurrection by his subjects. It would not have stood more than two discharges from cannon; but those articles the natives never used in their warfare — muskets of the poorest pattern being the extent of their resources. The king was seated on a raised platform, at the extreme end of his reception-room, decorated with skulls of his enemies, which his guard had killed in battle. On each side of his majesty was a line of warriors, looking as unlike women as possible. The king was dressed in the cast-off suit of some naval officer, who had, years before, made a present of it to his majesty, and received in exchange two or three hundred dollars' worth of ivory, in the shape of elephant tushes. His head was ornamented with a marine's hat, and covered with feathers of various tints, the red feathers of the flamingo predominating.

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By his side he had a ship's cutlass, without a sheath, and the stains of rust upon the blade were significant of sudden deaths of rebellious subjects, during moments when his majesty was not in a good humor. Cringy approached the great man — he was a tall, stout negro, black as coal tar — with many symptoms of reverence and admiration, and with no little tribulation.

"We come, great king," he said, knocking his head upon the mud floor, in token of his own littleness in the presence of so mighty a man, "as friends, and with friendly offerings. The white men, who are engaged in the slave trade, have heard of your majesty, and desired to see you."

"You are welcome, and also your friends. But where's the rum and tobacco?" his majesty replied and asked in the same breath, as though he considered them of much more importance than formal compliments.

Cringy hastened to take them from the hands of the natives, and lay them at the foot of the throne, when his majesty forgot his dignity, and starting up from the platform, made a dive at the bottle, which was filled with Medford rum.

"Rum?" said his majesty, shaking the liquor.

"Rum, your highness," replied Cringy.

The black monarch raised the bottle to his lips, threw back his head, and we could hear the liquor disappearing down his throat at a rapid rate.

"Ah," he sighed, as he removed the bottle from his mouth, and carefully re-corked it, "it is good rum, and I welcome my friends who brought it."

The monarch then descended from his throne, put the broached bottle under his arm, and waving all ceremony, approached us in the most free and easy manner, and shook hands.

"Tell the old fool," cried Murphy, "that we have visited him for the purpose of seeing an elephant hunt."

Cringy interpreted the captain's words, but I strongly suspect that he left out all superfluous compliments.

"To-morrow forenoon," was the king's answer, "my people will hunt the elephant, as a large herd is within a few miles of the village. You shall be welcome to see the sport, and shall be assured of my protection. I have said it," he continued, turning to his body-guard, and waving his hand with kingly dignity; and then he took a fresh pull at the rum, and rubbed his chest with

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satisfaction at the warm glow which passed over his abdomen in consequence. "The Americans are a great people," he said. "They make good rum." And as though to prove the assertion, he took another pull at the black bottle, and grunted his satisfaction more freely.

As there was nothing further for us to stop for, I proposed to Cringy that we should leave the royal presence, and take a stroll through the village. Our wish was made known to the king, and he graciously accorded us his permission; but while we were retreating from the hall of reception, his noble majesty hailed us.

"You can stop at the palace while here, and I will have a sheep killed for you to feed upon," he said; and then we bowed our acknowledgments, and were continuing on our way towards the door, when his majesty once more spoke, and we were obliged to stop and listen. "The white men like women — they can each have two wives while stopping in my town."

Cringy seemed to think that such a favor was worthy of an abject prostration, for it was seldom that the king opened his heart in such a striking manner. I would have declined the honor, but Cringy hurried me along, and I had no opportunity to speak.

Cringy's first visit was to the slave pen, an immense enclosure, the walls of which were built of heavy timber, and fifteen feet high, so that the captives could not escape during the night, although a guard was constantly on duty at the pen, with orders to shoot down all refractory slaves, and even those who were in the least inclined to stubbornness. We were readily admitted to the enclosure, for the king's orders had preceded us; and besides, Cringy was well known as a dealer in slaves, and one who had the first choice, if extra lots were offered. Here I saw for the first time the negroes destined to be transported to Cuba, and I must confess that I was somewhat astonished, for I expected abject despair, and an utter abandonment of all hope; but there was some cheerfulness, and in a few cases extreme indifference. The men and women were all together, and no attempt was made to separate them. Some were stretched upon their backs and basking in the hot sun, while others were sleeping under the roof which covered one quarter of the enclosure, and kept off the rains and heavy dews. Some were playing at games, and a number were seated in a circle relating stories, which were listened to with much eagerness and apparent pleasure.

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Captain Murphy and myself were objects of particular curiosity on the part of the captives, for we were the first white men they had ever seen. Much did they marvel at the color of our skin, and they were constantly comparing their black arms with ours, and apparently attempting to explain the difference. Some even rubbed at our hands for the purpose of seeing if we had not stained our skins with coloring matter, and when they found that our flesh remained without change, they would utter exclamations of astonishment. Cringy had bought the lot a week before we arrived, and he had expressly stipulated with King George that the latter should feed them and retain possession until they were wanted at the Gabun.

We left the slave pen highly satisfied with the cargo which we were to ship, and then strolled through the village, and examined everything that attracted our attention. The natives were quiet and civil, and followed us from place to place as objects of great curiosity, and we could not get rid of our admirers until one of the amazons overtook us, and informed us that dinner was ready at the palace. The instant the natives saw that we were under the charge of a body-guard, they dropped us and dodged into their huts, while we kept on our way and reached the palace, where we found the king gloriously drunk, and reckless of his dignity; for he had stripped off his uniform, and was rolling about the floor with nothing on but a piece of cotton, and that was rather scanty and out of proportion to his nakedness. He was in what they called a dangerous state, and was just as likely to order his best friend's head off as to take another drink of old Medford.

It was ludicrous to see Cringy work to conciliate the black king, and not cross him so as to expose his precious life. The rascal knew that each was necessary for the prosperity of the other, so I did not anticipate any violence, even if old Medford was in the ascendant. While compliments were raging, a fellow whom we took to be prime minister motioned us to follow him to another room, and we left his majesty somewhat abruptly. The apartment we were ushered into contained a few rough seats, a huge pot, tended by a naked female dripping with perspiration, and half a dozen slaves whose duty it was to wait upon us and see that our wants were supplied, for it was intimated that half a sheep had been boiled for our especial gratification, and that we were expected to do justice to the meal. The remains of the

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sheep were picked from the pot and spread upon huge leaves on the floor, and then we were encouraged to fall to and do our best. As the food did not look very appetizing, I concluded to make my dinner upon bananas, large numbers of which were piled up in one corner, and I intimated as much; but to my surprise I was refused, with many expressions of disgust, which I was at a loss to account for, until Cringy told me that the bananas which I saw had been poisoned for the purpose of stupefying the elephants which we were to hunt the next day.

As soon as the meat was cleared away, a lot of fruit, to my great joy, was brought on, and to that I did ample justice, and satisfied my appetite. Our dessert consisted of a bottle of claret, and when we had finished, it was intimated that the king's amazons were about to go through with their evening drill, and that we could witness it if so disposed.

Lighting our cigars we visited the parade ground, enclosed by the palace walls, and saw the famous soldiers, which were such a terror to the undisciplined tribes, drawn up in line, and the king, still retaining his bottle, reviewing them. Their evolutions were not marked with great precision, but Cringy was in raptures, and boldly proclaimed, in the hearing of the king, that the world did not contain anything half so magnificent — a remark that was calculated to please his majesty, if he was sober enough to appreciate it, of which I had some doubt. The military spectacle did not last over half an hour, when the line was dismissed, and the king staggered back to his palace, and we spent the rest of the day until evening in wandering about the town. At sundown, desirous of escaping the heavy dews, which are productive of fever, we returned to our quarters, and were shown separate rooms to lodge in; and to my surprise I found that the king had kept his word in regard to the appointment of wives for the time being, for I saw that the lady whom I was favored with had taken possession, and was apparently as contented as though she had a legal right there. In fact she was spreading blankets in one corner of the room, and seemed disposed to make everything comfortable for the night.

"Cringy," I said, "what shall I do?"

"Do?" repeated the negro, in astonishment; "why, do all the same as Captain Murphy. He no make a fuss."

There was truth in that remark, for the captain had closed his

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apology for a door, and not the first word of complaint was heard issuing from his den.

"S'pose you no honor de king's present, king he berry mad, and dink de woman no suit you. He kill woman in de morning."

To save her life, I compelled her to occupy one side of the room, while I took the other.

Before daylight I was awaked by the note of preparation in the court-yard, and in a short time old Cringy made his appearance in my room.

"Come," said he, "de people all get ready to hunt de elephant, and bress de Lord, de king is sober and good-natured as a sheep."

I lost no time in getting ready; and when Murphy and myself entered the yard daylight appeared, and revealed the strange-looking group who were to guide and protect us during the day. Not one of the black fellows had so much clothing upon his person as a ballet dancer, and, to add to their hideousness, their bodies were greased with palm oil from their heads to their feet. They were armed with long spears, and about a dozen of the famous body-guard carried muskets.

We started after a slight repast of boiled mutton, and our course was over a tract of land that was as beautiful and rich as any that I ever saw.

An hour's march brought us to the hut of the native who owned the banana patch where the elephants had committed their depredations. The dark-complexioned gentleman was unceremoniously compelled to leave his quarters for the king and friends, and we took possession, without reproaching our consciences for so doing.

As soon as we were refreshed, runners were despatched to find the elephants, and in half an hour they returned with the information that the herd were quietly feeding half a mile from the hut, and were quite docile. This intelligence inspired the king to commence operations immediately, and we started without delay. I observed our old friend Cringy did not manifest that alacrity in setting out that I expected, and when I reproached him with his lukewarmness, he pleaded that he was old and could not run fast; which I thought a good excuse, and would have left him behind, but his tormentor, the king, would not listen to the proposition for a moment; and with many rueful looks, Cringle was compelled to lead the procession.

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We marched until we heard the loud "trumps" of the elephants, and then halted, while the natives commenced collecting boughs which resembled grape vines in their size and toughness. They were found upon a peculiar species of tree in profusion, and as fast as they were brought in, they were knotted together, and coiled in a circle like the layers of a rope upon a ship's deck. I could not understand the meaning of such preparation, and was compelled to resort to Cringy. He enlightened me.

"Dem de elephants no like," he said. "Dey shun 'em, and no break through 'em if they can help it. We draw a line round de elephants, all but one place, and all shout loud. De elephants dey see de vines, and no care about touching 'em. Dey find de place where no vines, and dey go. Dat lead 'em in whar dey eat de pisened bananas, and den niggers kill 'em wid de spear."

I could hardly believe that such a course was possible, but the more I watched the conduct of the natives, the more convinced did I become that such was the plan for capture. I also noticed that the trees in the vicinity of the vines were left entirely unmolested, whereas hundreds were broken down where the vines did not grow. I became more interested, and watched the natives closely. When a sufficient number of vines were collected to form a rope at least a mile and a half in length, one native seized an end and started towards the brutes, which were grazing and "trumping" in fancied security. As soon as the native who led the way had got about twenty fathoms from the main coil, another native took hold; and so they continued to do until one half of the rope was out, when a second party commenced with the other end, and started off in a different direction.

Tired of remaining inactive, Murphy desired to get a nearer view of the elephants, and requested my company. We readily obtained permission of the king to do as we pleased; and as each of us was armed with a rifle and revolver, I did not think there was much danger. We stole forward, guided by the loud trumps of the mighty beasts, and after five minutes' navigation through thickets and forests of trees, got sight of the animals; and the view amply repaid us for our trouble, for we saw twenty elephants browsing upon the branches of trees, which they bent to the earth with their trunks, and held until the tender shoots and buds were nibbled off. They were of all sizes, from the full-grown elephant with tushes five feet long, to the yearling just cutting its teeth.

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The rogues were entirely unconscious of our presence, and would have remained so had not the devil possessed the captain to try his hand at a shot. I sought to reason him out of his freak, but he would not listen to my suggestions, and swore a great oath that he would kill one at fifty yards, or he would never take a rifle in his hand again. Murphy picked out the largest and probably the ugliest brute in the herd, and after a deliberate aim, fired. The ball took effect in the side of the animal, where it had no more effect than to render the old fellow furious with pain; and with a shrill trump he raised his trunk, snuffed the air for a moment, and then charged towards the very spot where we were secreted. I sprang to my feet, and shouted to the captain.

"Run," I said, "or you will be trampled to death in an instant."

"Run be hanged!" replied Murphy; "he's going to drop dead in a minute."

"He has no such intention," I answered. "Follow me, or we shall both be killed."

"I tell you that he's as dead as a marine. I hit him near his flipper. See him bleed."

"Yes; and see him coming towards us under a full press of sail," I replied, as I bounded towards the place where the natives were at work.

As I ran, I looked over my shoulder and saw that Murphy was laboring along after me, like a Dutch galliot in a heavy head sea. But it was not an easy thing to make good time where the underbrush was thick and the vines strong, and before I had got ten fathoms, I heard Murphy roar out for me to heave to and wait for him.

"Darn it, man," puffed the captain, making almost as much noise as the elephant, "can't you render a little assistance to a friend in distress?"

"Run, captain; 'tis your only chance," I replied, still making rapid tracks for the nearest clearing.

"It's all very well to say run when a man don't carry a pound of flesh upon his bones; but I can't, and blow me if I will; that's flat. Here's for a standing fight, for I can't run any farther."

I stopped for a moment, and saw, to my horror, that the captain, completely blown by the amount of sail which he had carried, was incapable of proceeding farther, and was making desperate attempts to climb a tree.

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When I turned, it was with the most confident expectation that the captain would be trampled to death in a minute's time; but the old salt had no such anticipations, for when the elephant got within boarding distance, the captain kept the tree between himself and his enemy, and every movement was watched with keen eyes. The elephant charged around the tree, but the captain managed to keep just such a distance from him, and also avoided the heavy blows from his trunk, which struck the tree every few minutes in a manner that gave fearful indications of the brute's strength.

I attempted for some time to get a shot at the elephant, but the rogue did not raise his trunk sufficiently high, and I had been told that a ball, to have effect, must strike between the shoulders, just below the head; and while I was seeking for a chance to fire, the captain roared out at my delay.

"Hang it, Mr. Robert, are you going to let this brute eat me alive, or grind my bones to a jelly as thick as lobscouse. Fire, in the devil's name, for the fellow's trunk is flying around my head like a boatswain's cat after a liberty day on shore."

Thus appealed to, I moved a few feet nearer the principal actors; and as I did so, the elephant caught a glimpse of me, apparently for the first time. With a shrill trump of rage he charged towards me, his trunk well up as though to crush me at a blow. I calmly awaited his onset, and when he was within two fathoms, raised my rifle and fired. The next instant I had dropped my weapon and sprang behind a tree of large size, from which place I ventured to survey the field. The elephant had charged past the spot where I stood, like a whirlwind, prostrating half a dozen young trees in his course, and levelling every bush that stood in his way.

I hoped that the old rogue would keep on and leave me, but he was not disposed to do any such thing. He soon found that he had missed his mark, and with another trump that was not calculated to allay alarm, he tacked ship and steered direct for the tree whose protection I had sought. I looked around for the captain, but he had vacated the place he occupied with so much honor to himself and confusion to the elephant, and supposed that he had made the best of his way towards the natives; but I was disappointed, for I heard him hail, and his voice proceeded from the top of a tall tree where he had sought refuge.

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"Mr. Robert," he said, "why in the devil's name don't you run before the wind like me?"

"Because I'm blockaded," I answered, rather snappishly.

"Run the blockade, then," he shouted; but I did not think his advice of much account, when my enemy was capable of taking two steps to my one.

While I was thus having a little free conversation with my friend the captain, the elephant had stopped, confused by the sound of voices, and somewhat uncertain which way to proceed. I took good care not to expose myself to his view, for I hoped that he would rejoin the herd and leave us in peace; but I was disappointed, for the old rogue snuffed the air like a war-horse, discovered my position, and on he came with a succession of trumps which sounded like a six-pound gun battery.

I had nothing but my revolver to depend upon, for I had thrown my rifle away in my flight. I recollect of hearing the captain shout, "Run, Mr. Robert, run!" as the elephant came on; but I was not in a position to take his advice. I waited until the old rogue was within a fathom of me, and then took aim and poured in two shots as quick as possible, and ran to the next tree, the captain shouting in true nautical style, "Steady as you go," when he saw me depend upon my legs for safety.

When I gained the tree that I started for, I turned and looked back, and was astonished to find that my enemy had got somewhat confused by the last two shots, and imagined that Murphy was the one to blame for his suffering; and to my great joy the brute was at the foot of the tree, and looking up to the branches, as though desiring a little private conversation with the person who was roosting there. As Murphy declined to come down voluntarily, the elephant sought to shake him down, and every time the brute rubbed its side against the tree, it trembled as though laboring in a gale of wind.

While this was going on, I again obtained possession of my rifle, and loaded it with a double charge of powder and three slugs. Then creeping under the shade of some bushes, I obtained a good position, and put the rifle within ten feet of the elephant's throat. The instant the rogue saw me I fired, and the lead went home; for with a stagger and a grunt, the huge monster sank upon his knees, made an effort to rise, was unsuccessful, and then rolled over on his side and breathed his last.

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The captain soon reached *terra firma*, and was warm in his congratulations. While we were carefully examining the carcass, half a dozen natives arrived to discover what we were doing, the king having heard the firing, and feeling somewhat uneasy at our absence. We could not comprehend their words, but their gestures showed the most extraordinary astonishment at the death of the elephant. They were not accustomed to kill them in a bold, fair manner; and they would not believe but that we had poisoned them with bananas, or with some powerful drug. When they shook their heads Murphy swore that he would thrash them if they ventured to doubt again; and it is probable that they understood the hint, for if they did venture to do such a thing they did not manifest it by words or signs.

The natives considered the matter of so much importance that one of them started off to find the king and bring him to the spot, and when his majesty arrived he too was astonished, but it was of the selfish kind. He spoke to Cringy, and the latter interpreted as usual.

"De king says dat you have done well," said Cringy, "and dat you deserve a reward for killing de elephant. He let you hab one of de tushes, and he keep tudder. Dat berry kind of him."

The proposition was one that I could not reject, much as I should have cared to, for I wanted to retain the tusks as trophies.

As the king had waited some time for us, he now gave orders that the herd should be driven towards the pen, which was built just at the edge of the woods, and which had been used several times before for capturing the brutes. As soon as this order was passed, the vines which I have before alluded to were fastened to the trees, clearing the ground about four feet. Then the Africans armed themselves with conchs and noisy reeds, and commenced the most fearful din that mortal ever listened to. The effect was instantaneous. The elephants, which were scattered in various parts of the wood, set up a loud trump, and sought to escape from such unpleasant companions. They came tearing towards us at a tremendous rate; but upon reaching the vines they halted suddenly, snuffed the offensive matter with a snort of deep disgust, and then turned tail without seeking to break through, which they could have done without the least effort on their part.

"Come," cried Cringy, "we go get up tree dat overlook de pen, and see 'em go in. No use staying here."

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Leaving the black monarch to continue his directions, we ran quickly to the spot indicated, and mounted a tree that seemed to have been used frequently for the purpose of overlooking the pen. Hardly had we secured a comfortable seat, when the whole herd of elephants came tearing towards the trap, their trunks well up, and offering the prettiest shot for a marksman that I ever saw. The herd caught a glimpse of the opening, and saw that it was not guarded by the obnoxious vines. Then they charged towards the pen, and a struggle ensued as to which should first enter.

A loud shout was heard in the woods, and a fresh blast of the reeds and blowing of the conchs. The elephants made a desperate struggle, and the foremost ones entered the enclosure, thus clearing the way for the others; and in a few seconds the whole herd were safe within the pen, and their escape impossible. The natives then came from the woods, and piled up trees and branches in the opening, and their victory was complete.

Previous to the entrance of the brutes, the natives had scattered their poisoned bananas on the enclosure, and as soon as the animals found that their retreat was cut off, they commenced feeding upon them; but half an hour elapsed before the effect of the poison was perceptible. Then they staggered and reeled like drunken men, and the massacre commenced. The Africans climbed the trees which surrounded the pen, and showered down spear after spear, with wonderful precision, upon the defenceless brutes; and as every spear penetrated the body of the monsters and remained sticking in the flesh, they soon resembled gigantic pin-cushions. Blood flowed in torrents; but this only increased the ferocity of the Africans, and they shouted in triumph every time that a spear penetrated farther than usual.

One by one the poor brutes sank down exhaused, and died with hardly a struggle; but even after death the natives were not content with their work, but continued to hurl spears until they were overpowered by fatigue, and compelled to desist. Then the entrance to the pen was cleared of obstructions, and the Africans rushed in to despoil the dead elephants of their tusks, for which all this slaughter had taken place. Disgusted with the African method of hunting, I left the tree, and was met by the king, who inquired how we liked the sport, but what answer Cringy returned I am unable to say. My reply was not complimentary, and I think that Murphy swore a little at what he called black cruelty.

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CHAPTER IV.

WE SAIL, AND MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE. — A STERN CHASE. — A YARN. — A TERRIBLE PROPOSITION. — AN ESCAPE.

When we reached the town the king took an affectionate leave of us, as we persisted in our determination to return to the Coquette that night. He promised, if we would visit him again, to make an excursion and foray to some of the neighboring tribes, and show us how his Amazons could fight, during a battle, and we expressed due gratitude for the invitation, and a hope that we should live long enough to see his body-guard under fire.

Our return to the Gabun was rapid, and we got sight of the Coquette before sundown. To our great surprise and joy, we saw that the Serpent had left her anchorage, and our hope was, that she had left the coast. Before we gained the side of the Coquette, we saw Ruez, and Murphy hailed him.

"Where is that bloody old Englishman?" he asked.

"Gone," replied the Portuguese, waving his hat with joy.

"And I hab but five dollar in pilotage fees," muttered Cringy, with rueful looks.

"Cheer up, old feller," replied Murphy. "We have now a clear field, and if you put three hundred lively niggers on board of the Coquette to-morrow, five dollars shan't make you miserable."

This appeared to satisfy old Cringy, and the next instant we were alongside, and learned from Ruez that the night before, the Serpent had got underweigh unexpectedly, and stood out to sea. The supercargo had improved the opportunity, and got the guns up, and had already laid the slave deck, and we were then ready to receive our cargo as quick as it arrived.

Instantly Cringy was all animation. He went on shore and despatched twenty of the largest canoes up the river for the slaves at King George's Town, and promised that they should be on board by noon the next day; and he was up to his word, for by eleven o'clock the fleet of canoes hove in sight, with just the number we wanted for a cargo. The negroes were received

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on the schooner's deck in gangs of ten, and then transferred to the hold, where they were placed in sitting positions, ranged in long lines, and shackled to iron rods which were firmly secured to the schooner's beams. In this manner not an inch of spare room was wasted, but the uncomfortable and confined position of the slaves can be imagined. By six o'clock all the negroes were on board; the grated hatches, by which the slaves received light and air, were on and secured, and the Coquette was ready for sea. The business with Cringy had been settled during the afternoon, and a promise made to supply us with another cargo six months hence, at the regular rates. As soon, therefore, as we had eaten supper, the order was passed to "up anchor," and with a light land breeze, we crossed the bar and shaped our course for Cuba.

Wine was brought to the quarter-deck, and Murphy and Ruez drank success to the voyage. While this revelry was going on, one of the men startled us by the cry of, —

"Sail, ho!"

Murphy dashed the glass, which he was about raising to his lips, overboard, and sprang to the spot where the alarm was given.

"Where away?" he asked, eagerly.

"Off our starboard quarter, sir; just in the wake of the moon," replied the man, pointing with his fingers in the direction indicated.

The captain levelled his spy-glass, and looked long and anxiously at the stranger, and without speaking a word, handed me his glass. No sooner had I glanced through it, than I recognized the low, heavy hull of the Serpent.

"Well," asked the captain, as I drew a long breath, "what do you think of her?"

"It is the Serpent," I answered, as calmly as I could.

"I know it. Throw the log, and see how fast we are moving."

I threw the log, and found that we were making nine knots, large.

"We merely hold our own on this point of sailing," Murphy muttered, with another glance at the Englishman. "Were we on the wind we should leave him, I think."

"The Serpent is reported to be the smartest sloop of war in the English navy," I said.

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"I know it, and she will have to show her heels most effectually to overhaul us. She is now about five miles astern, and if it was not for this cursed moon we could give her the slip without trouble. Thank fortune, he can't use his bow chasers at this distance, and if the worse comes to the worse, we can give shot for shot. I once escaped by means of a long Tom," Murphy said, after a few minutes' silence. "I was within two days' sail of the coast of Cuba, with five hundred blackbirds on board, when an inquisitive Englishman gave chase. He fired two or three shots, and I ran up Yankee colors, but it made no difference. He was bound to board us, and as his ship sailed faster than my brig, there was a smart chance that he would succeed. His bow chasers were making a little extra work for the carpenter by splintering our spars, and as a last resort, I determined to return shot for shot. I got the midship gun ready, and pointed it with my own hands. The first shot carried away the Englishman's fore-topmast, close by the cap. That riled him amazingly, and he hammered at me in double quick time, cutting holes in my sails and bringing some of them down by the run. My fourth shot took his main-topmast, and with it all the top-hamper, studding-sails, and royal, and top-gallant sails, and over the side they went, with a dozen or twenty topmen, who were wetting the sails to make them hold wind. It was a saucy trick, but it succeeded."

"And you escaped?" I asked.

"Certainly — but it cost me the brig, for the cuss repaired damages, and followed close on to my heels to the south side of Cuba; and by the time I had landed my niggers, he was off the port as good as new, and all was ready to send his boats in to cut me out. But I foiled him there, for I set fire to the brig and burned her to the water's edge."

"The profits of that voyage must have been small," I remarked.

"We cleared over one hundred thousand dollars, and then had enough left to build this schooner and fit her out. But while we are talking the Serpent is gaining on us, or else I am deceived very much."

The captain spoke truly. The Serpent was one complete mass of canvas, and looked, in the clear moonlight, like an iceberg drifting towards tropical climes. The schooner was carrying all

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the sail that she was designed to carry before the wind, but not in proportion to the ship, and we were now driven to the expediency of inventing methods of urging the Coquette through the water at a faster rate. We took a flying-jib-boom, run a rope through the shive hole, and lashed it to our main boom, so as to project about twenty feet beyond the schooner's taffrail. Then we rove halyards and bent on a spare jib, and hoisted it to the gaff, trimmed aft our sheet, and had a new sail that pulled like a pony team. The Coquette felt the influence, and for a short time I thought that we held our own with the ship; but the hope was delusive, and other resorts were thought of and adopted. We rigged whips at the mast-heads, and dashed every sail with water, from the royal to the huge square-sail; and the result justified our expectations, for the canvas shrunk and held every breath of air that passed, and to our extreme satisfaction, we found that the Serpent no longer gained on us. Our triumph was a short one, for the wind gradually left us, and the sails flapped idly against the masts, or hung in wrinkles from the booms, while, to add to our mortification, the Serpent still continued to forge ahead, and evidently was bringing a breeze with her.

"God has deserted us," muttered Murphy.

"That is the last name that I should have expected to hear you utter," I remarked, in astonishment.

"Why?" he replied, with some excitement; "do you think that because I am engaged in the slave trade, I have no feeling of reverence for the Supreme Being? There are worse trades than the slave trade. But see that blasted ship — how she is gaining on us!"

The captain's Christianity vanished with an oath.

"There is not a breath of wind," muttered Murphy, "and I am fearful that we shan't have any to-night. If the sloop should take a fancy to get her boats out we might have a little brush."

"He has got his boats out, I believe," I said, after a brief scrutiny through the glass while the captain was talking.

Murphy snatched the glass from my hand, and looked long and earnestly.

"By the piper that played before Moses, they are coming towards us, and intend to carry the Coquette by boarding. Call the hands up and load the guns, and see that Long Tom has a

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double charge. But never mind; I will load that gun myself, and try the effect of a long shot."

The boats from the sloop of war, four in number, began to spread out as they advanced towards us, in the shape of a fan, for the purpose of distracting our fire, if we were disposed to resist.

"Where is Ruez?" asked Murphy, after the guns were loaded.

"He is still in the cabin, swigging at the wine," I replied.

"He is a shrewd manager, but not fighter, as you shall see before we get out of this brush."

But while Murphy was talking, to my surprise, Ruez left his bottle, staggered on deck, and approaching the captain, spoke in the Portuguese language, which fortunately I understood.

"We shall be taken," Ruez said, "and condemned, unless we do the old trick. Time enough — if you say so."

"There is not time enough," replied Murphy, sternly. "Even if there was, I will not sacrifice the niggers in that manner.

The Portuguese staggered back to the cabin, and I saw no more of him until morning.

"Do you know what he wanted me to do?" inquired Murphy, turning to where I stood.

"No."

"He wanted to destroy all evidence of our being a slaver," the captain said, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"For Heaven's sake, in what manner?" I asked.

"There is but one way," the captain replied, pointing to the water, with a grim smile.

"Drown them!" I exclaimed, horrified at the idea.

The captain nodded.

"But you would not commit such a wicked and cruel act?" I asked.

"No, I will sooner run the risk of capture, and trial. I once saw it resorted to, and it was successful in saving the schooner; but it was at the expense of three hundred niggers, every one of whom was thrown overboard with ten pound of shot at his feet. It was blowing fresh at the time, and no sooner did the wretches touch the water than they went under. The slave deck followed, and when we were overhauled and compelled to run under the guns of a sloop of war, there was nothing on board that could condemn us."

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While the captain was relating the above incident of slaver life, the boats from the ship were slowly approaching us. The crew thinking that Murphy was inclined to surrender without striking a blow, began to grumble.

"The old man has lost his spunk; he isn't the skipper that he was five years since, when I first knew him. There was a time when the boats of a bloody Englishman would not have dared to approach us like these," and other words of like effect.

Murphy heard them, as it was intended that he should, and his eyes lighted up like those of a tiger, when it hears the step of a hunter.

"They think that I won't fight," he said, in a whisper, "but I will soon give them a lesson. The boats are now within half a mile of us, and can be reached by our guns. I was in hopes to prevent the flow of blood, for I see a wind bank rising in the westward, and if we could get a few puffs we should soon be beyond the reach of the boats and their crews."

He turned to his men, and with a word stopped their growling. He sprang from the quarter-deck, and with a handspike pointed the long midship gun in the direction of the boat that was approaching us off the starboard bow. Just at that moment the man-of-war's men cheered, and bent to their oars most lustily. Murphy squinted along the gun for the purpose of taking a good aim.

"Fire!" he cried, suddenly; and as he spoke the schooner shook from stem to stern by the concussion.

I saw the ball touch the top of a long swell, and then shatter the boat as though it had been made of paper. The cutter that was nearest to the one injured hastened to its relief, but the other two continued to come on as though determined to revenge the insult. Just at that moment a light breeze rippled over the water and filled our sails.

"The schooner has steerage rig," I said. "Perhaps we can escape even now, and save human blood."

"You are right," the captain replied. "Secure the gun, some of you, and the others trim the sails."

The ship had not caught the catspaw that filled our sails, so we had an advantage, and were eager enough to keep it. We saw that the boats no longer gained on us, and that the Coquette was moving through the water at the rate of about five

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knots per hour, and that the wind was constantly increasing, although the only place that it came from was a large white cloud, which had been rolling over in the direction of the land, and which seemed to increase in volume as it approached us.

"In with the square sails and all the light kites," the captain said, as soon as the guns were secured. "Work lively, men, for there is no time to lose. Clew down and clew up."

Murphy cast anxious and hurried glances to the windward, as though speculating regarding the weather.

"We shall catch it in a few minutes," he said; "and when it does arrive it will come butt end foremost, like a nigger in a fight. See everything ready for letting go with a run, for a moment's delay may ruin us."

"Are you afraid of that white cloud?" I asked.

"Yes; and let me tell you that there is more danger in those white clouds than if they were blacker than old Cringy's hide; and if John Bull is not careful, he will give his carpenters work by morning. Ah, he has hoisted his boats up, and is after us like a land shark trying to collect a bad debt. The fool has got everything spread like a first class ball-room belle."

He had hardly finished speaking when we could see the squall coming, raising a line of white foam as it advanced, that glistened in the moonlight like piles of silver.

"Let go everything by the run, down with the foresail and mainsail, and secure them with stops. Work lively, men, for now is our chance."

The sails came fluttering to the deck, when they were secured by gaskets; but, before the men had completed their work, the squall struck us upon our beam, and nearly buried us beneath the water and foam that flew over the deck.

"Hard up!" yelled Murphy; and after a struggle the helm was obeyed, and the Coquette flew before the wind like a bird on the wing.

For a few minutes we could only hold on to the rigging, and save ourselves from being washed overboard by the waves, which were lifted by the gale and dashed upon the deck, frightening the negroes who were confined in the hold, and causing them to utter the most frantic yells. But as the Coquette got before the wind and minded her helm, we began to look around to see how much damage we had sustained. Luckily for us, the squall had struck

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us under bare poles. We found that we had sustained but little damage, besides the loss of a top-gallant mast, which we could repair in an hour's time; and after we had satisfied ourselves on that point, we turned to have a look at the Serpent, which we had last seen with all sail set close upon our heels. By our course we found that we were close on her; but she was no longer to be feared as far as pursuit was concerned, for all three topmasts were gone close to the caps, and were in a confused mass alongside. We could see the officers of the ship on the quarter-deck looking at us, but even had they been so inclined, they could not have fired a shot, owing to the elevation of their weather guns.

In an hour's time the Serpent was out of sight; and then, as the wind moderated a little, we altered our course, and made sail for the port of our destination. We secured the guns for the night, tried the pumps, and were rejoiced to find that the schooner, in spite of the immense strain to which she had been subjected during the squall, was perfectly tight and uninjured.

The next difficult thing that we had to contend with was to quiet the slaves, who still continued to utter shrill yells, as though they expected death every moment. The poor wretches were terribly sick, and it is no wonder that they were alarmed, when it is considered that sea-sickness, even with all the comforts of an attentive steward, and the resources of a cabin, is the most disagreeable feeling that can attack man or woman.

That night I began to comprehend all the mysteries and miseries of the slave trade. The stench that arose from the hatches was overpowering and sickly in the extreme, and it seemed as though I should vomit every time I inhaled it. My duty, however, led me to look after the comfort of the captives as much as possible.

"You will get used to this in time," the captain said, when he observed my expression of disgust. "We haven't begun to get it sweet yet. Wait till we have been in hot weather two or three weeks, and get short of water. Then they will smell loud; and if a man-of-war is six miles to the leeward of us, the officers, if old hands to the African coast, can tell that we have slaves on board. All the perfume in the city of Cologne could not banish the smell."

My mind was too much occupied with the scenes through which

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I had passed that night to admit of sleep, and I was not sorry to pace the deck, and consider whether I should continue the dangerous life I was embarked upon. I lighted a cigar, and hour after hour thought of the narrow escape which we met with, and debated whether it was worth the gold I was to receive to continue to run such risks. I arrived at the conclusion that it was not, and if landed safe at Cuba, I would leave the Coquette, and seek to gain an honest livelihood in other business.

When my watch was out, I left the deck in charge of the second mate, and tried to sleep, but continually before my eyes would rise the scenes through which I had passed, and most prominent of all was the sinking of the boat and the struggling crew, sent to Davy Jones's locker when they least expected death, and were least prepared for it. I was not sorry to see daylight, and when I went on deck found that Murphy and Ruez had preceded me, and were sweeping the horizon with glasses to see if they could discover a sail, but nothing was in sight. The ocean was quiet, and only a light breeze rippled over the water, just sufficient to fill our sails, and send us along upon our course about four knots per hour.

"You are up early," said Murphy, as I made my appearance. "What is the matter? Did last night's scenes trouble your mind?"

"I have thought much of last evening's doings," I replied, "and must confess that I'm not infatuated with the life of a slaver."

"Pshaw, don't mind that; think of the money that we should have lost had the Englishman captured us, as he intended to do."

Suddenly there was a terrible yell in the hold, as though every negro confined there was determined to test his lungs, and see how much noise he could make.

"Ah, that sounds lively," cried Murphy, rubbing his hands with a look of real pleasure.

"For Heaven's sake what amusement can you find in that horrid discord?" I inquired.

"The certainty of hunger," was the reply. "The rascals feel like eating and drinking, and as long as they continue in that state, there is no danger of their committing suicide."

As such terrible cries needed some attention, I called the crew up and prepared to feed the slaves, who had eaten nothing since they came on board. As feeding them was an important part of

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a slaver's life, I will show the reader how we proceeded. In the first place, six of the men were armed with loaded muskets and cutlasses, and stationed near the hatchway, with orders to shoot the first negro who manifested signs of mutiny, as they sometimes did, when carried away by despair, or swayed by hunger. The hatches or gratings were removed, and twenty negroes allowed to come on deck at one time, for the purpose of inhaling fresh air, eating their supply of rice and bread, and drinking a pint of water each. The latter article appeared to be the one most prized, and it was wonderful to see how eagerly they clutched their share, and swallowed it at a draught, and looked with longing eyes for more. But water was as precious to us as gold, and only the regular allowance could be permitted.

We had one captive who was a splendid-looking fellow, as straight as an arrow, and over six feet tall. He must have possessed immense strength, for his chest was broad, and the muscles of his arms were prodigious. He had been a chief in his country, and those who were confined nearest to his person looked upon him with the most abject reverence; and the chief accepted it, in spite of his fetters, as though he was entitled to it, and born to receive homage.

As a general thing it is bad policy to have a sulky and complaining slave on board. One negro who continues to grumble and fret will set the others at work, until they grow more miserable at each day's confinement, and lose all flesh and all spirit by the time the vessel has reached its destination.

Ruez had intimated to Murphy that the ex-chief was not a proper man to receive on board, and the captain knew as much; but he was ambitious of taking to Cuba the best looking negro who had been landed for many months, sure that he would command a large price as a field hand on a sugar plantation.

When the chief's turn arrived to visit the deck, Murphy gave express orders that he should be treated with kindness, and that he was to be humored a little. The man whose duty it was to remove the shackles, had no respect for a negro, and disobeyed these commands. When the chief refused to move, or remained doggedly quiet, the sailor kicked him on his ribs, and that awakened the slumbering devil in the slave's disposition. We supplied the division to which the chief belonged with food and water, but all attempts to make the huge negro eat were fruitless.

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I reported to the captain that the chief was obstinate, and Murphy went to see what effect his words would have upon his pet, as he called him. The captain, however, was no more successful than the rest of us. The negro was scornful, and pointed, as well as his ironed hands would permit, to the sailor who had abused him. The captain misunderstood the action, and thought that the slave refused to eat because he was manacled. He ordered that his irons should be struck off, which was done, and the chief's countenance lighted up with an expression of ferocious joy that was not very inviting to look upon. He stretched out his arms and rubbed the numbed flesh, but still he did not manifest any signs of partaking of the food which was offered him.

"Put the fool below again," said Murphy, pettishly.

The men advanced to obey the order; but before they could touch the negro he suddenly turned, and with a powerful blow knocked down the man who was nearest, and then with a spring gained the side of the sailor who had kicked him.

"Seize him!" roared Murphy; but the order was too late. The men rushed towards the chief; but before they could reach him he had wound his powerful arms around the struggling sailor, lifted him as easily as though a child, gained the bulwarks of the vessel, and plunged overboard.

This was the last we saw of the chief and his victim. Both sank and rose no more.

"A thousand dollars gone to Davy Jones's locker," muttered Murphy, "and all owing to a kick. Well, it was a dear one, and I shall have to make it up by taking the amount out of the dead fool's wages, as I don't think his heirs will make their appearance to claim them."

After that we exercised extra precautions against suicide; for if slaves once become dissatisfied, and desire to die, they will strangle each other, or resort to any means to produce death. In this respect they equal the Chinese.

Day after day passed, and at length we neared Cuba, the island of our destination. Our cargo began to show the effects of close confinement, and it was no uncommon thing to find as many as six dead slaves when we took off the hatches in the morning. The living ones lost their flesh and resembled skeletons, listless and stupid, without any appearance of hope, or desire to live. The stench which they emitted was terrible, and every day we

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feared that a fever would break out and decimate the ranks of the negroes with frightful rapidity. But fortune favored us at length, and we got a slant of wind and crowded sail for the little port of Quitero, on the south side of Cuba, and near two hundred miles from Havana.

As we ran in towards the small harbor, night overtook us, so it was impossible to tell whether the coast was clear of English men-of-war, or whether one was lurking in the bay. Still Murphy knew the port, and had no hesitation in pointing the nose of the Coquette direct for it; but when we were within a mile of the anchorage we shortened sail and "hove to," and with our night glasses endeavored to pierce the gloom. We could see lights on the shore, but none on the water; but we knew that it was a trick frequently resorted to by men-of-war to keep dark, in hope of drawing in slavers, and then capturing them without any trouble.

"We must make our usual signal," Murphy said, turning to Ruez. "I don't dare run in until it is answered. If the agent is not there, we must wait until morning, and run the risk. Get the blue lights, and have them ready."

A package of blue lights was brought on deck, and a man stationed at the bows, a second midship, and a third on the quarter-deck, so that a line of blue fire would extend the whole length of the schooner. The lights burned out, and the darkness was more intense than ever. We watched the shore anxiously for the purpose of seeing if our signal was answered. Minute after minute passed, and there was no response.

"The agent is not there, by thunder!" muttered the captain; but hardly had he uttered the words when a rocket flashed into the air.

"That's one," cried Murphy, with an expression of joy.

Another rocket, of pale green stars, was thrown into the air, and then all was quiet as before.

"That's two," cried Murphy. "The fellow is there, sure enough. One more, and the coast is clear."

Five minutes elapsed before the third rocket was let off. It was a pale white one, with but a few stars of the same color.

"Draw away the jib; put your helm up. The coast is clear, and we are safe at last, thank God."

When we were within half a mile of the harbor we heard the

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sound of oars, and through the darkness could make out a boat approaching us.

"Boat, ahoy!" hailed Murphy, in his sternest tones.

'*Amigos*," was the response.

'*Buenos*," Murphy continued.

"*Noches*," replied the speaker in the boat.

"It is our agent," the captain said; and in the next instant the boat was alongside, and a Spaniard sprang upon deck, and greeted the captain and supercargo most heartily.

"The devil — but I am glad to see you," Murphy said. "I feared that the wolves were around, and that we should have trouble in landing."

"And so you would yesterday, but to-day the coast is clear as a priest's conscience after a fortnight's fast. I have been here a week, and looked for you every day. You have come in time, for the price of slaves is up, and none in the market."

By daylight the slaves were on shore, and on their way to the interior, and all evidence of slave traffic was also landed, and put in a place of safety.

CHAPTER V.

THE SERPENT AGAIN. — AN EXCHANGE OF CIVILITIES. — HAVANA ONCE MORE. — ON SHORE. — A DANGEROUS FLIRTATION, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

"WE intend to run down to Havana, and have a little fun on shore before we start for another cruise," Murphy said, one day, about a week after our cargo was landed.

"I did intend to quit the business," I said, after some hesitancy.

"What, quit a trade that is paying you five or six thousand dollars per year? You will do no such thing, nor think of such a thing, after a week's run on shore. You have seen only the dark side of a slaver's life. Wait until you see the bright side, before you make up your mind."

And I listened to the voice of the tempter and faltered. My good resolutions were entirely forgotten, or banished from my mind, and I only longed for the time when I could find some con-

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solation on shore, as a recompense for my dangerous and arduous duties.

Before we left Quitero we altered our rig most materially. We sent down our square sails and yards, and made the Coquette a regular fore and after. Then the outside was altered — the narrow red ribbon was painted over with a streak of white, and the dark sides were rendered brighter by a coat of green, which rather spoiled the looks of the schooner, so even her best friend would not have recognized her half a mile distant.

After our arrangements were completed we left Quitero, intending to return to that port again as soon as we had laid in a stock of provisions, and once more take on board the spars and slave deck which we had left behind. We worked our way steadily towards Havana, and when within ten miles of Moro Castle, our old enemy, the Serpent, was seen off the port, standing off and on under easy sail, and evidently looking for us, for the instant we were discerned under the land, the man-of-war made sail, tacked ship, and stood towards us, luffing well up, so that we could not enter the harbor without passing within range of his guns. Murphy manifested no uneasiness, nor made the slightest attempt to escape. We were not suffered to get nearer the land without some slight notice from the Englishman, and it was manifested by his pitching an eighteen pound shot directly across our bows.

"That means show your flag," muttered Murphy. "We will gratify him. Let him look upon the yellow bunting of Spain, and see if it will suit him."

The flag was run up, but did not seem to satisfy the commander of the Serpent, for in a few minutes a second shot was fired, and it struck very near our cutwater.

"Well done, John Bull. You are improving in gunnery, and if we offer ourselves as targets much longer, you will hit somewhere. Haul the jib to the windward, ease off the fore and main sheets, and put the wheel down. There is nothing like politeness upon the ocean."

The captain's orders were obeyed, and in a few seconds the Coquette was stationary upon the water, while the Englishman, who was to the windward, edged away cautiously, as though fearful there was some trick in our compliance, and was determined not to be cheated.

"See the effect of having a bad name," laughed Murphy.

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"The Englighman suspects the schooner is the same one that slipped through his fingers off the coast of Africa, and he don't like to trust us."

The man-of-war neared us, and we could see that the captain held a glass in his hand, which was often levelled at the schooner, as though puzzled at our new paint. The Serpent still keeping the windward, ranged alongside with its battery frowning upon us.

"Schooner, ahoy!" the captain cried.

"Well," was Murphy's laconic answer.

"What schooner is that?" was demanded; and the tone was fierce, as though no trifling was to be admitted.

"This is the schooner Coquette, Captain Ruez, bound for Havana and a market."

"Where are you from?"

"We left the river Gabun three weeks since, after lying there a month waiting for a cargo, which we did not get."

"You are not sticking to the truth, sir," the English captain said, haughtily.

"A lie well stuck to is as good as the truth," Murphy replied, with a boldness and spirit that must have astonished the Englishman.

"I shall send a boat on board, sir; and if you are the one who dared to fire at my boats, I shall take you as a lawful prize."

"Do so, by all means, if you think best. We have made a poor voyage, and as peaceable traders, would like to make up for our losses."

The Englishman dropped his cutter in the water with a suddenness that was startling. It showed that he was in earnest in what he was about to do.

We received the officer who landed upon our deck, backed by a dozen jolly tars, armed with cutlasses, and a brace of pistols for each man, in the most polite manner. The officer glanced over our deck in expectations of seeing the guns, with which we were armed when we met the Serpent at sea, but which we had prudently landed at Quitero. Finding nothing that excited suspicions, he turned to Murphy.

"Where is the gun which destroyed one of our boats, and killed four of our men?" he asked, sternly.

"I don't understand you," the captain replied, blandly.

"Blast your comprehension then," the Englishman answered.

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"You know what I mean well enough. You fired at one of our boats — didn't you?"

"No," answered Murphy, with the most confident assurance.

The officer was staggered by the lie, and could not speak for some seconds.

"Did we not chase you off the coast of Africa?" the Englishman asked, at length.

"Not that I know of," was the very calm answer.

"I know better, sir. You were loaded with slaves, which you have landed; you only escaped by the aid of a sudden squall. Can you deny that?"

"I can and do deny it, and I dare you to prove your assertions."

"'Tis the same schooner," muttered the officer, confidently.

"Rig and paint the same, I suppose," said Murphy, sarcastically.

"O, I am up to that dodge, and understand it. Paint costs but little, and is easily put on."

"And civility also costs but little, but I seldom meet with it at sea," the captain said, insolently.

The officer bit his lip, and looked as though he would like to hang every one of us to our own spars.

"The question is this," said Murphy. "Do you wish us to haul down our flag and surrender as a prize, or do you intend to let us continue our course, and make Havana? You have the power to do one or the other, and I am waiting patiently for you to decide."

The officer did not reply. He motioned to his men, and they removed the main hatches; but nothing was to be seen but dunnage and watercasks. The effluvia of slaves, however, was strong, and it fairly scented the atmosphere.

"I smell slaves!" the officer exclaimed, turning up his nose.

"Can you see any?" asked Murphy, with a chuckle.

The officer did not reply. He sent men into the hold to search for a slave deck and for shackles, but neither was to be found. Then our papers were overhauled, but they were correct, and bore the stamp of the Havana Custom House. They looked the schooner over once more, but nothing but the terrible stench which would issue from the hold, was to be found against us. They left us, and we remained quiet until the boat was hoisted up, and the officer had made his report. Then Murphy hailed, —

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"Ship, ahoy!" he cried. "Am I now at liberty to proceed on my voyage?"

For a few minutes there was no reply; then the captain of the Serpent responded, —

"You may go," he said; "but I will catch you some day."

"Thank you," answered Murphy, raising his hat; "I hope not. The English ship is not yet built that can catch us."

In an hour's time we were half a mile to the windward, and half a mile ahead. This was triumph enough for us, and mustering all hands on deck, we cheered most lustily. The Englishman heard us, and his disgust was complete. He put his helm hard up, rounded in his yards, and went skimming off before the wind, as though bidding us a long farewell. We beat up to the entrance of Havana harbor, ran in under easy sail, and dropped anchor close to the mole.

The second day after our arrival the crew received one hundred dollars each, as an advance of what they were really to have; and with the money, permission to go on shore and enjoy themselves for a week. To make up for their absence, we hired half a dozen shoremen to take care of the vessel, and see that she was kept in good order. At the same time I was informed that the amount of money which was really due me, was near three thousand dollars, and as an earnest that I was to receive it, I got a check on Messrs. Riego & Nearti, the great slave bankers, for the gold. Anxious to see something of Havana life, I dressed myself in my best, and left Murphy to look after the schooner, and figure up the profits of the voyage.

"You had better take a small revolver with you," the captain said, when he saw that I was dressing with as much taste as possible, and had eschewed all sailor habiliments. "I think that I can read your face and thoughts, and it might be well to go prepared while on shore. The Spanish women are not always faithful, and the Spaniards are sometimes jealous. If you won't wait a day or two and have my company, you had better go armed. Take a revolver, and be careful how you use it. If you should get into trouble and want help, shout as loud as you can the word '*Africa*,' and if any of our organization is within hailing distance, you won't be deserted."

I took the captain's advice, and put a small revolver in my pocket. As soon as I landed, I steered for the banker's and pre-

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sented my check, and after a brief glance at my face it was paid, without the slightest hesitancy.

"Has the senor any commands for our firm?" the old man said, who paid me the money. "I see that the senor has made a successful voyage, and that the Coquette is likely to earn her owners much gold. I thank the saints that the cursed English were tricked."

Here was a man whom I had never seen before, yet who knew me and the vessel to which I belonged. It was a mystery, and I asked for information.

"O," he answered, with a dry smile, "we have a register containing the names and description of all the prominent officers engaged in the slave trade, so that in case of misfortune or capture we should know whom to help with money or influence. You are engaged in a business that requires much secrecy, but as long as you are faithful and attentive to it, your name will stand well upon our books, and assistance will always be rendered you from a common fund; but you must distinctly understand that only upon conditions of your being faithful and active in the service."

I had no idea that the trade was carried on so systematically. For the purpose of testing the old gentleman's assertion, I ventured to ask for a description of myself; and without the slightest hesitation, he turned to a large book, and read, —

"'Ernest Robert, mate of schooner Coquette, American, twenty-two years of age, five feet ten inches high, dark hair and black eyes, white teeth, intelligent, and a good navigator, will bear promotion by and by, if faithful.' There," said the senor Riego, "is your portrait, and a very flattering one it is. You stand high upon our books, and it depends upon yourself to stand even higher. A fortune is before you, if prudent and attentive."

The old senor closed his secret volume, and restored it to the huge safe from whence he took it, and by that time my funds were counted out and spread before me in gold ounces.

"Is there anything that we can do for you to-day?" the senor Riego asked.

"Yes," I replied, after a moment's thought. "You will please take charge of this money until I send an order for it, or come after it in person. Two or three hundred dollars will be sufficient for me to expend while I am on shore."

"A wise resolution," said Mr. Riego. "I suppose that you

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are on shore for a frolic, and I hope that you will be discreet and drink no more than will be necessary for your health, and above all things avoid gambling."

The old Spaniard smiled as though he knew that his advice was all lost; but just as I was turning to leave his counting-room, he said, —

"You are a stranger here, and I fear may be swindled by knaves. I will send one of my young men with you, and he will introduce you to all places of amusement. Francisco, go with he American and look after his welfare."

A youth, with large, black eyes and sallow face, slipped on his white linen coat, and then advanced and extended his hand with a conciliating smile. We shook hands like old friends, and left the banker's house together. We entered a café on the Plaza, called for ices and cigars, and they were brought us; and while we were chatting on different subjects, two ladies entered and took seats very near us. One was young and very handsome, while the other I judged to be about forty.

"She is very beautiful," I said, turning to Francisco, my companion.

He laughed, and lighted a fresh paper cigar.

"I would give a trifle for an introduction," I continued. "I suppose she is some rich man's daughter, and is destined to marry a title as well as a fortune."

Francisco continued to laugh, and would give me no explanation.

"She is very beautiful, and very dangerous," he said at length; and sent the ladies a bundle of paper cigars by a waiter.

They acknowledged the compliment with a bow, and a slight smile. I was anxious to open a conversation with them, but Francisco refused to encourage me. He seemed adverse to such intimacy with the strangers, but for what reason I was at a loss to imagine. Suddenly the ladies threw away their cigars, paid their bill, and rose to depart. The younger one turned her flashing eyes upon me for one moment, and in that glance I read as plain as though she had spoken, "I dare you to follow me, sir;" and as though to make the invitation plainer, she dropped her glove upon the floor in such a manner, that mistake was impossible. As soon as they reached the door I seized the glove, and determined to restore it to its owner without delay. I saw

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the ladies enter a volante, and the younger one looked back to see if I followed.

"Where are you going?" asked Francisco.

"To restore a glove," I answered.

In another instant I was in the street, sprang into a passing volante, and told the driver to follow the one which contained the ladies.

"I will meet you here at nine this evening," shouted Francisco, standing on the sidewalk laughing.

We rode over the Plaza, and then dashed through a long street that led towards the country. Occasionally my dark-eyed maid looked back to see if I followed, and once she waved her ungloved hand, as though bidding me to come on.

"Never fear, young lady," I muttered, "I will keep you within sight for a dog watch at least;" and when my driver slackened his pace, I had only to promise an extra reward to make him renew it.

In a few minutes we stopped in front of a house where the volante had left the ladies, and I lost no time in dismounting. I walked up a lane, bordered with orange trees in full bloom, on both sides, until I reached the house, which was a neat, unpretending building, two stories high, and like many of the houses in Cuba, constructed of stone and wood.

The front door of the mansion was invitingly open, but, to my extreme disgust, a huge dog stood there also, and showed his teeth in a menacing manner, but otherwise manifested no signs of attack. I looked at the dog, and the dog returned the compliment with every tooth in his head. To proceed would have subjected the dog to a certain death, or my coat to a rupture, and being on a friendly visit, I did not care for either extremity. While I was thus situated, who should make her appearance but my divinity, looking much prettier than the figure head of the Coquette. When she saw the position which the brute and myself occupied, she smiled so pleasantly that I had a great mind to fall down and worship her. She spoke to the dog, and he retired growling, as though he rather disliked her interference.

"Who did the senor wish to see?" the lady asked, just as though she didn't know.

"The lady who left her glove in the *café*," I replied, producing the piece of kid, which did not look large enough for an infant.

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"Ah, I am so forgetful," she cried; "I had no idea that I left it. I thank you a thousand times;" and she extended her hand to receive the prize.

I managed to touch her hand as I handed the glove to her, and that touch was like an electric spark to my nerves. The blood bounded through my veins like the Coquette in a stiff breeze over the ocean.

"As you have been to so much trouble on my account, I shall be happy to repay you in some way. Will the senor enter the house, and refresh himself with some fruit and a glass of wine?"

Of course I said that I would, and she ushered me into an apartment that was furnished with scrupulous neatness and plainness. I took a seat, while she left the room, begging me to excuse her for a few minutes. While she was gone, I congratulated myself on my assurance, and hoped that the adventure would end pleasantly. In a few minutes the lady returned, accompanied by a huge negro, over six feet high, and stout as an ox. He bore a waiter that contained oranges, bananas, and apples.

"Come, senor," she said, with a frank smile, "you must be tired. Let my hospitality be the means of restoring you."

She motioned the negro to place a chair for me at a table, and took one herself.

"Shall I bring the wine, senorita?" the negro inquired.

"Yes, bring the wine — the weak wine," she replied. "You are a stranger in Havana?" she asked, as she cut an orange with a silver knife.

"I am, lady; but I hope I shall be well acquainted before I leave the city."

"Have you many acquaintances in Havana?" she asked, carelessly.

"Not more than two," I replied, without a moment's thought.

"And those are very dear to you?" she said, with what I thought was womanly curiosity.

"I have no one that is dear to me in the world," I replied.

"What?" she asked, "have you never loved?"

"Never until the present time."

She smiled, as though she was far from being displeased at my boldness. After a moment's silence she said, —

"Are you an American, senor?" she asked, with a sweet look.

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"Yes, senorita."

"I have heard that Americans are very rich, and are quite free with their money."

"They are liberal, but all are not rich. I wish that you would test the former. Send me to the city, and bid me bring you a present. Name what you want, and I will secure it."

She appeared to think for a moment, as though she had a mind to try my liberality. But she thought better of it, and shook her head.

"We are strangers," she said, "and it would not be proper for me to accept presents. My aunt would frown."

"But we are not to remain strangers always," I said; and I ventured to touch her fingers, as though accidentally.

She did not withdraw her hand, and I grew bolder.

"I don't know that I can confide in you, and yet you look honest," she said.

"Trust me once, and if I deceive you, never trust me again," I replied.

"But a maiden can trust but once. If she lose confidence, then all hope leaves her heart."

"Then you are unmarried?" I cried.

"Of course I am;" and she laughed most merrily.

"Then I have gained information that lifts a burden from my heart. I will be bold, and hope that you will pardon me. I love you."

She gave a little scream, and put her hand to my mouth. I kissed it, and retained my hold of it in spite of a faint struggle. Just at that moment a door opened, and the giant negro looked into the room.

"You called me, senorita," he said.

"No, Antonio, I did not call."

"Does the senorita wish for anything?"

"Nothing, Antonio."

"Will not the senorita have a bottle of wine — cool wine?"

"No. You can go," she said, addressing the slave; but he did not move, and I thought that the lady looked frightened.

"You black rascal," I said, rising from my chair; "if you don't obey the lady, I'll break your head."

I saw that the girl exchanged glances with the negro, and then the latter seemed inclined to be more friendly.

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"I thought that the lady called me," he said; and bowing in a surly manner closed the door.

"Antonio is very careful of me," she cried, with a laugh that was a little forced. "He is rather inclined to look upon all who visit me in the light of lovers, and fears that their intentions are evil. He has been in our family many years, and is treated as a favorite. I shall have to scold him for his familiarity."

I was satisfied with the explanation, and somehow, little by little, she managed to draw from me the fact that I had some three hundred dollars in gold in my pockets, and that I was not particular in what manner I spent it.

"I have heard that American gentlemen are always armed with horrid pistols or knives, as though they expected to be attacked every moment."

I remembered the six-barrelled revolver I had in my pocket, but I felt ashamed to acknowledge I had one, and I determined to deny it.

"Americans never go armed unless they expect danger. Now why should I carry weapons, when my visit is one of love and not warfare? I should feel humiliated if I thought you suspected as much."

"O, but I don't suspect such a thing. Besides, you look as though you would not insult a lady by entering her presence with a pistol."

I bowed, and wished my revolver on board the Coquette, for I felt that it would be humiliating to be detected in a falsehood. We chatted familiarly on various topics, and at length I thought that it was time for me to return to the city.

"You will allow me to call again, I trust," I said, and arose.

"But you have no intention of leaving me at this early hour?" she asked, with a hand on my shoulder.

"You are charming," I cried, and put an arm around her waist and drew her towards me.

Blast that nigger! He would persist in opening the door just at the wrong time. I had hardly encircled her waist, when I heard the door creak, and the lady sprang from my embrace. I looked up and saw the negro regarding us.

"You can remove the fruit," the girl said, carelessly, "and inform my aunt that the senor intends to remain all night."

I almost doubted the evidence of my senses. Here was an

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invitation that I had no thoughts of receiving, consequently I was raised to the highest pitch of happiness. Even the brawny negro seemed pleased, and smiled his satisfaction.

Carried away by the warmth of my feelings, I grew more communicative, and pleaded my love in no measured terms, and while I was dodging when the negro entered the apartment, and kissing the girl when his back was turned, think that I got along very well for a new beginner. At any rate, she manifested such partiality for me, that I had some thought of proposing marriage; but I recollected Murphy's advice "to see how the land lay before splicing was broached," and accordingly so governed myself. I had no need to blame the lady's coldness or want of hospitality, and by the time we had dined, and I had been introduced to Senorita Olivado, the aunt of Isadora, I felt that I was quite at home, and took good care to make myself as agreeable as possible. The afternoon wore away most pleasantly. I hinted once or twice for a walk in the garden, but each time my wish was opposed on some trifling ground that was not satisfactory, although I did not urge matters.

"By the way," Isadora asked, "did the driver of the *volante* tell you that he should call for you?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Simply because I will send you to town in my carriage, in the morning, without trouble. You had no acquaintance with him?" she continued, after a moment's thought.

"I should hardly know him again, or he me," was my answer.

"That is good."

She apparently spoke without thinking, for she flushed suddenly, and then kissed me, as though to banish all unpleasant thoughts.

When the lamps were lighted, I saw that the number of negroes in the house had increased. That in addition to Antonio there were two others, not as large as the first named, but stout, athletic fellows, and rather above the condition of slaves. Their movements were independent, as though they were privileged servants, and had been pampered until spoiled. At length the hour arrived for retiring, and I gently intimated to my fair companion that I should like to seek my couch. Lighting a lamp, she bade me follow her, and we passed up a flight of stairs, through a door that was so extremely massive, that I wondered to what use it was ever put. Reaching the head of the

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stairs, I found two rooms which were located in the rear part of the house, but they communicated with each other by a door that had neither lock nor bolt.

"Here, senor, is where you are to sleep," she said, entering the larger room of the two, which contained a wardrobe, a bed, two chairs, a wash-bowl, and pitcher.

These things I noticed at a glance

"And where do you sleep, senorita?" I asked, with a warm kiss.

She pointed to the next room, and smiled.

"There is no lock on the door," I said.

"There is no occasion for one," was the reply. "I trust to your honor not to disturb me during the night."

I think that I made no vows, unless a dozen kisses can be called such; and then we parted, the lady leaving me the light for the purpose of undressing.

I heard Isadora in the next room, as though she was preparing for rest, and I had a mind to speak with her regarding the security of the house; but abandoned the idea, and was about to set my lamp down upon a chair, when I saw a spot upon the floor that attracted my attention. I held the light to it, and saw that it was dark, and of the color of blood. For the first time a suspicion darted through my brain that perhaps the lady, whom I had promised to love so devotedly, was not what she seemed. I tried to account for the spot in various ways; but the more I pondered on the subject, the more perplexed did I grow. I saw that attempts had been made to erase the stain, even by scraping the wood; but the fluid had sank deep into the cedar, and showed as clear and distinct as when it first fell. While I was thus occupied, Isadora called to me: —

"Has the senor retired?" she asked.

"No; I am thinking," I replied.

"And of what is the senor thinking?"

"How much I love you?" I rejoined.

She laughed, and I paid no more attention to the spot upon the floor. I threw off my light coat, removed my shoes, and then turned down the sheets of my bed. The linen was clean and white, and the hair mattress looked inviting. I finished undressing, placed my gold in a belt around my person, and got into bed.

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"Isadora," I said, "I am in bed."

"Then why not extinguish the light?" she asked, as though she had been waiting at the door, listening to my movements.

"You must come and do that," I replied.

"Me?" she cried. "I am sure I shan't."

"Then let it burn all night."

There was no response on her part, but I thought I heard a suppressed whispering in her room. I listened attentively, but could make nothing of the words used. I removed my revolver from under my pillow, where I had placed it, and by holding a sheet over it, was enabled to examine it carefully. The charges were all right, and I placed it in a convenient place, so that I could lay hands upon it in case of necessity; for somehow I began to feel as though I had mistaken the house, and that my adventure was not likely to terminate as pleasantly as I supposed. The whispering still continued, but I was determined to let the girl know I heard it.

"Isadora," I said, "who are you talking with?"

There was silence for a moment, and then she spoke.

"You heathen," she cried, "I am saying my prayers, which is more than you have done, I'll warrant."

She laughed, and I again felt my stock of confidence rising. I rested my head upon my pillow, and just at that moment my light was extinguished, but in what manner I could not tell. When I looked at the lamp a moment before it was burning brightly, and there was sufficient oil to last half the night.

"Hullo, Isadora," I cried, "the light has extinguished itself. There is no occasion for your presence here."

There was no response.

"Do you hear me? or have you fallen asleep?"

Still there was no answer. I thought she was remaining silent for the purpose of inducing me to seek for a response. I was easily tempted in those days, and I do not hesitate to say that I left my bed and groped my way towards the room occupied by Isadora. I reached the door and paused. I had some respect for her position, after all.

"Isadora," I whispered, "don't be alarmed. I have visited you for the purpose of having a little private conversation. You will pardon me — won't you?"

Still she remained wilfully silent. I grew bolder, and left the

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door open, advancing in the direction of the bed, or where I supposed it rested.

"Isadora," I continued, "are you asleep?"

There was no reply. I hit my shin against a chair, and the pain provoked an English oath of some magnitude.

"She is pretending sleep," I thought, and I continued my investigations as soon as the pain would permit me. I reached the bed, and felt carefully for the purpose of discovering which was the head of it; and when I had done so, I once more whispered a caution not to be afraid, and put my hand upon that part of it where I supposed I should find the person of the lady. To my intense disgust and disappointment Isadora was not there; and what was worse, it was evident that she had not laid down. I dressed, and then sought to open the door which led down stairs, but to my surprise it was fastened on the outside, and all quiet attempts to open it were futile. I did not get alarmed, for I thought there was no occasion for such feeling; but I did sit down in a chair, and curse in a quiet manner, for allowing myself to be tricked by a woman whom I thought was all innocence and simplicity. But cursing would not relieve me, so I concluded to stretch out on the floor, and rest with my eyes open until morning. I thought that perhaps if I laid upon the bed I might fall asleep, and not wake up again in good order and condition. Two or three hours passed, and I think that at length I grew drowsy, for I was suddenly startled by a movement that proceeded from the direction of the wardrobe. I remained perfectly still, and listened. The noise ceased, but I could hear a subdued whisper that was rather ominous. The talking died away, and all was still for a few minutes, and then came a sudden creak, as though the doors of the wardrobe were opening slowly. I strained my eyes, and tried to discover who was in the room; but the darkness was too intense, and I could only listen and remain silent. All was quiet for ten minutes; but I fancied I heard deep breathing, as though some one was waiting. Then I heard a whisper, and could make out what was said.

"I tell you he is asleep and on the bed."

The voice was that of Isadora. The handsome little wretch — I began to comprehend that she was not the amiable person I supposed her to be.

"You are sure he is not armed?" I heard Antonio ask.

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"Did he not say so? Did he not look offended when I hinted such a thing?"

"True — and you are sure of the money?"

"He has it with him — in gold. But I wish you would take it and spare his life. He loves me so dearly."

"You are a fool," Antonio cried; and I thought his voice, even as low as it was, partook of some feeling of jealousy.

"Don't let us stand here whispering all night. Let us work."

That voice belonged to one of the negroes whom I had seen at the house after dark.

"If you had let me brought in the drugged wine," Antonio said, "he would have slept so soundly that there would have been no trouble."

"But there will be no trouble now if you spare his life. You had better do so, for the last one created some stir."

"Bah!" cried the giant negro; "you love the white man, and would save his life. He shall die."

I heard the scoundrels move across the room, and reach the bed. I held my breath and listened. There was a moment's pause, and then a heavy blow was struck that made me shudder. It was evident that the villain, thinking I was on the bed, had struck with a knife, intending to make short work of me.

"Have you finished him?" asked Antonio's companion, speaking no longer in a whisper.

"He is not here!" cried Antonio; and I thought that he manifested some alarm.

"Not there? Where in the devil's name has he gone?"

"He must be in the next room. He has gone in search of Isadora, and fallen asleep."

"Then let us light a lamp and find him," one of the negroes said.

I sat up, revolver in hand, while the ruffians were lighting the lamp.

"He is in the next room," Antonio said, in a whisper.

"Let us go and fix him while he sleeps," the other cried; and they were moving towards the door, when I spoke.

"If you are looking for me, you need not go far," I said, rising to my feet, and keeping my revolver concealed from their view.

The negroes started, and turned suddenly towards me. Each

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was armed with a knife, and the expression of their faces showed that they were determined to use them. They made a movement towards me, holding the light in such a manner that they could see if I carried anything in my hands. Isadora had disappeared.

"Don't advance another step," I said, calmly. "You are already near enough."

They halted and looked at me, but seeing no arms, still supposed that I was defenceless.

"What do you wish?" I asked. "If you want my money, you can have it, but not by force."

"We do want your money," Antonio said, "and we will have it."

"But you will spare my life, I hope," I continued, for the purpose of seeing to what extremities they would proceed. "Yes," I continued, "if you will spare my life, and let Isadora leave the house with me, you shall have all my money."

The features of the giant were convulsed with rage. I had excited his worst passions, as I supposed I should.

"Come, say the word, and the money shall be yours," I cried. "She will go with me, I know."

"You have spoken with her on the subject," he cried, fiercely.

"Of course I have, and she promised me with a kiss."

"Then, curse you, you shall die at any rate!" shouted the negro, raising his knife, and plunging towards me.

He was quick, but I expected his movements, and was prepared for them. When he was within four feet of me, I raised my revolver, and took fair aim. He saw the weapon, and would have stopped, but could not; and just as his knife was about to descend upon my breast, I fired, and sprang one side. There was a stunning report, and then a heavy fall that shook the whole upper part of the house. The negro kicked convulsively, and then all was quiet. His companion seemed half inclined to risk his life to avenge his comrade; but on second thoughts concluded that he would not, so turned and fled towards the wardrobe, the doors of which stood open. I thought that possibly he might escape, and call a gang of ruffians to his assistance, and then make short work with me. With this impression I did not think that I should be justified in letting him off free; so, just as he had gained the wardrobe, I raised my pistol and fired. The

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ball struck the fellow on his hip, and he clapped one hand upon that portion of his person, gave a fearful yell, and strove to keep his feet. But the effort was too much; he staggered, and fell heavily. Even then he sought to escape by crawling towards the wardrobe, but I frustrated it by stepping in front of him. The negro was desperate, and did not like to yield. He aimed a blow at my legs with his keen, glittering knife, and I narrowly escaped a bad wound. I jumped aside, and the blade was buried in the floor, and broke short off at the hilt. Then I had him at my mercy, and he knew it.

"Spare my life, senor," he pleaded. "I did not mean to harm you."

"Yes; the broken knife is evidence that you did not," I replied, touching with my foot the weapon, which still remained in the floor.

"I did not know what I was doing, senor. O, the pain in my hip is so great that I shall die. I cannot move my leg. Mercy, senor, for love of the saints!"

"Dog!" I replied, "you deserve to die like your brother ruffian; but if you will answer my questions truly, I will spare your life."

"Speak, senor, and I will answer truly, or may the saints never pardon me."

I cocked my pistol. The negro saw the movement, and fearing that I was about to make short work with him, howled dreadfully.

"Be quiet, you brute, or I'll give you something that will make you."

He ceased instantly, but watched my every look and motion with intense eagerness.

"Tell me how many are connected with your gang," I asked.

"Three, senor; Antonio, myself, and a negro named Pedro."

"Where is Pedro?"

"He is outside of the house, for the purpose of giving a signal if any one approaches."

"And where is the girl, Isadora?"

"She is in the room underneath, senor, waiting for us to finish our job."

"And her aunt, where is she?"

"She is not her aunt, senor, although she has passed as such.

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She has gone to Havana for the purpose of learning if there were any inquiries respecting you."

"Did the girl plan my murder?" I must confess that I was rather anxious for an answer that would exculpate her from such a charge.

"Antonio would not promise her that your life should be spared, and she quarrelled with him on that account. Antonio was jealous of you, senor, because he thought that she loved you."

"And do you think that she does?" I asked; for even then I was willing to forgive the girl. Man is so anxious to overlook faults in the woman he loves — *before marriage.*

"She seemed to think more of you, senor, than any man she ever saw."

I was ready to forgive the fellow after those words. I began to regret that I had injured him.

"How many men have you robbed in the house? Answer me truly, for your life depends upon it."

"Six, senor."

"And have you murdered them after taking their money?"

"We finished them first, and robbed them afterwards, senor?"

"How did you induce them to visit the house?" I asked.

"In the same manner that you were invited to come here. Isadora acted as a decoy."

"Was she Antonio's mistress?" I asked, after some hesitation, for I feared that his answer would be in the affirmative.

"No, senor; she refused to have anything to do with him, except in the way of bringing people here. She received one third of the money that we got. Antonio received one third, because he owned the house and furniture; while the other third was divided between Pedro, the old woman, and myself."

"You are certain that was the only connection between Antonio and Isadora?" I asked.

"Yes, senor; for the poor fellow has begged and prayed to the girl to marry him, and she has laughed at his passion."

"Was Antonio a slave?" I asked.

"No, senor; he purchased his liberty five years since, with money he drew in a lottery."

"Are you a slave?"

"I am, senor, and live with my master about half a mile from here."

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"Can I find Isadora by descending the stairs, through the wardrobe?" I asked.

"Yes, senor, if she has not fled from the house."

I seized the light, and determined to commence my explorations without delay, for I was anxious to see the girl, and upbraid her for her treachery, and then, perhaps, forgive her.

I entered the wardrobe, and saw before me a flight of stairs, which were very steep and very narrow. I cautiously descended, and upon reaching the landing, found that I was standing in a small closet, large enough to hold three persons by close packing. I looked hard for a door, but none was to be found; and while I was thus occupied, saw many stains of blood upon the floor and stairs. I did not feel in the least disturbed, as I knew that I could break through a window up stairs, in case I did not find an outlet from the closet; so, with as much composure as if I had been upon the deck of the Coquette, I continued my investigation for a secret panel, and at length my patience was rewarded. I saw a small brass knob in one corner, and on pressing upon it gently, a door sprang open. I stepped out quietly, and found that I was in the entry, or passage-way of the house, on the ground floor, and that I was near this heavy door which I had noticed when I went to bed. I tried this door, and found that it was locked and bolted, and then passed on rapidly to the apartment where I had been entertained during the afternoon by Isadora. During all this time I had not met with a single person.

I entered the room where I expected to find Isadora, but she was not there. There was no light in the apartment, excepting the one which I carried, and with that I examined every part of the room, and then searched other portions of the building. No one was to be found, and I suspected that the discharge of my pistol had alarmed Isadora, and she had fled from the house. Perhaps, I thought, she has gone in search of the police, and will thus have an opportunity to tell her story first, and involve me in some trouble. The more I thought of the matter, the more I became convinced that such might be the case, so I determined to leave the house without delay.

I set my lamp down, and walked to one of the windows in the back part of the house. It was not secured, and as soon as I raised it I dropped to the ground, and found that I was in the

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garden, concealed by orange trees, which grew in profusion near the house. I listened attentively for a moment, but only the wind, sighing through the branches was to be heard. Then I started for a hedge which bordered on the road, and with a nimble leap cleared it, and commenced my walk for Havana, nearly three miles distant, and past ten o'clock in the evening.

Just as I was congratulating myself on my good fortune I saw half a dozen lights on the road ahead of me, and thought I could distinguish the clash of arms. I considered it was best to make all secure, and not trust to chance; so I concealed myself by the side of the road, and thought that I would wait until the crowd passed. I had barely got under cover of some bushes, when the lights and people carrying them neared me, and to my surprise I counted no less than six soldiers, armed with muskets, and at their head marched a ferocious-looking sergeant, and by his side the slave who had been intrusted with guarding the outside of the house while his comrades performed their work within.

"You heard two shots," the sergeant said, addressing the negro.

"Two, senor, and then groans. I did not enter the house for fear I should share the fate of those who were within."

"*Bueno.* You did right; and if we take him, you shall be rewarded; but if you have given us this long tramp for nothing, you had better have a care of your back, for the men will tickle it."

"You will be convinced, senor, that I have spoken the truth, for I heard a woman scream and then saw her leave the house."

I waited until the soldiers were out of hearing, and then left my place of concealment, and continued my way towards the city as fast as I could walk. I met with no interruption until I reached the guard-house, which stood just upon the outskirts of the city, where I knew I should be challenged if I attempted to pass, and possibly detained until morning. To avoid this, I struck across a field and gained a street that led me towards the Plaza, which I knew if I found, I could easily reach the *café* where my new friend Francisco was to await my arrival, although I had but faint hopes of finding him at that late hour. I soon reached the *café* where I had left Spaniard, and to my joy found him eating ices and smoking cigars, surrounded by three men about as old as himself.

"Ah, *Americano!*" my friend exclaimed, as soon as he saw me, making room for me by his side.

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He introduced me to his friends, and my arrival was the signal for fresh bottles of wine, more cigars and ices.

"Come," cried Francisco, after I had drank a glass of wine, "give us the history of your adventure, unless you are bound to keep everything secret, in which case we have no questions to ask."

"Perhaps what I have to say should be told you alone," I replied, "and then if you think it is proper to speak more fully, I will do so."

The others bowed, as though they had no objection to such a course, and taking Francisco aside, I related the scenes through which I had passed. He listened most attentively, but did not interrupt me by a word until I had concluded, and then he commended me for my prudence, and congratulated me on my escape.

"I laughed when you left me this forenoon," he said; "but it was because I thought that the only danger you would encounter would be the loss of a few ounces. But this is serious, and shows the girl has commenced a new game and an evil one."

"But what am I to do?" I asked. "I run great risk in remaining on shore."

"We must meet the charges which they bring against you at once," said Francisco, "and keep the police quiet. We have no time to lose if we intend to act. You must come with us."

"But where?"

"To the house where the shooting occurred."

"But there is danger of my being arrested," I urged.

"Don't fear on that account. My friend and myself have some little influence with the police."

After telling my story, each man extended his hand and pressed mine warmly.

"Fear nothing," they said. "We are bound together by no common ties, and what Francisco advises is for the best."

We started to find a volante, and did not have far to go to obtain one that suited us. While we rattled along my companions were anxious to hear further particulars. I told them all, and while they listened in astonishment, all were anxious to see the revolver which had performed its work so thoroughly. I handed them the pistol, and by the time all had seen it by the aid of the lamp which the volante carried, we had reached the guard-house, and were stopped by a sharp challenge. Our driver waited patiently until a sergeant, with a lantern in his hand, advanced to scrutinize us.

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"Hallo, Pedro! what is the meaning of this?" asked Francisco.

"Ah, senor, a murder has been committed at the *casa Tafrata*, and we are looking sharp for those who did the deed," replied the sergeant.

"Bah, and did you expect to find them coming from Havana?" asked Francisco.

"It is hard to tell, senor, where to look for the one we seek."

"Well, we shall stop at the *Tafrata* and see how things look. You are satisfied that we have done no ill?"

"The saints forbid, senor, that you should kill, unless in a fair duel, and then may you always triumph. Good night, and a safe return."

In ten minutes time we had reached the house and stopped. Lights were flashing from every window, and at the front door we could see a soldier armed with musket and sword to prevent access to, or egress from, the building. We alighted from the volante, and walked slowly up the avenue leading to the house; but when within a rod of the sentinel he covered us with his musket, and challenged.

"Who comes?" he asked; and his challenge brought two or three of his companions to the door.

"Friends," replied Francisco.

"We know no friends here," was the answer. "Stand where you are until you can give an account of yourself."

The sentry spoke to one of his comrades, and the latter hurried off, and returned in a few minutes with his commanding officer. He had a pen in his mouth, as if he had been interrupted while writing.

"Who wishes to see me?" he asked, advancing towards us rather cautiously, as though he feared a surprise.

"A few of your old friends, sergeant. Don't you recollect us?"

"Diablo, can I ever forget you? Have you not played wild pranks enough in the city to make me remember you for life?" was the answer.

"But we have always paid for them like cavaliers, have we not?" Francisco asked.

"The saints be praised, but you have, so I have no fault to find. What do you want here at this hour of the night?"

"We heard a rumor that blood had been shed, and we are anxious to see it. Besides, we learn that a pretty girl is some-

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how mixed up in the matter, and we want to see her, and do her a service."

"I suppose so," muttered the sergeant. "You youngsters are always having your eyes towards the women, and we honest fellows of the army don't stand a chance when you and your money come in sight. But there is no show for you here, senor, I can tell you; for the girl is a prisoner, and will be kept as one until wanted as a witness."

"That is the very reason we desire to see her; for how do you know but we can throw some light on the matter, and assist you in the investigation?" asked Francisco.

"If you can do that, I shall think you are of some use in the world, for all that we have to work upon now is what a slave tells us; that the man who fired the pistol is an American, and a desperate one at that. The girl whom I expected to get full particulars from, refuses to utter one word that will give us a scent. But we shall find him before many days have passed, or set the police of Havana down as of no use."

"We did that some time ago," Francisco replied, with a laugh. "But come, old friend, don't keep us waiting here all night, when we can be otherwise employed, and in doing some good. Let us go and see the parties, and you and your comrades shall not be forgotten."

The sergeant appeared to take the hint, for he touched his hat and smiled. In fact such an expression stole over his face as would lead one to think that he expected a pecuniary reward for his consent. He turned and led the way towards the house, and the soldiers who were collected in the entry of the building saluted us in true military style, and with smiles of good humor. We entered the house, and followed the sergeant to the very room in which I had made such desperate love to Isadora in the afternoon. Francisco motioned me to keep in the background, and to pull my hat over my face for the purpose of concealment; hints which I obeyed quite readily.

As we entered the room I saw that Isadora was seated with her back to the door, under the charge of a soldier, while on the floor, groaning with agony, was the negro slave whom I had wounded in the hip two hours before. A short distance from him, seated in a chair, and also guarded, was the negro Pedro, who had given information to the police.

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"Now, then," said the sergeant, "we will recommence our interrogations in relation to this affair; and mind, young woman, that you speak the truth, and freely, or the worse will it be for you. I wish one of you gentlemen would write down the answers which we receive; for, to tell the truth, my hands are stiff, and my penmanship none of the best. I have commenced the work, but have made little progress."

Francisco volunteered to write down what was desired, and the sergeant, full of the importance of his commission, began to question the girl.

"Tell me what kind of looking man was the one who committed the deed?" the soldier asked.

"I don't know," was the response.

"Was he tall or short?"

"I have forgotten."

"Was he dark or fair?"

"I did not notice."

"What countryman was he?"

"He spoke Spanish like a Spaniard."

"Was he a Spaniard?"

"I don't know."

"In what direction did he fly?"

"I did not notice. I was too terrified."

"How came the murderer here?"

"He stopped at the house for a glass of water, and then asked the privilege of remaining all night, complaining that he felt sick."

"Did he carry off valuables when he fled from the house?"

"I think not."

The sergeant, despairing of receiving any information of value from the girl, turned to the wounded negro for the purpose of questioning him. It was necessary to move the slave a trifle, so that a view could be obtained of his face; and when this was done, and the crowd had fallen back, the wounded man looked anxiously around the room, until his eyes fell upon me. In spite of his wound, and the pain under which he labored, he struggled to sit erect, and pointed with his hand at me, shouting, —

"There is the murderer!"

Isadora started to her feet, and uttered a faint scream; and the soldiers, to prevent my escape, if I had been so disposed, closed the door and stood before it. I was not taken by surprise, for I had

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expected such a denouement, and was nerved to meet it. The sergeant looked astonished and confounded. He hardly knew what to do or say under the circumstances, and turned to Francisco for advice.

"Is the senor a friend of yours?" he asked.

"He is a friend of mine and the gentlemen present."

"What reply can he make to the charge thus brought against him?" the officer asked.

"Let us first find out what charge is brought against him. A slave has accused him of murder. Let the slave produce his proof."

"That is right. Let the slave tell what he knows regarding the senor," the sergeant said, turning to the wounded man.

"He came to the house to-day in search of the young lady, and was invited to stop all night," the fellow replied, still keeping his eyes fixed upon me, as though fearful I should vanish from his sight. "He wanted the lady as a companion, but when she refused, and called upon Antonio and myself for assistance, he drew his pistol, and killed Antonio and wounded me. Then he fled."

"Are you sure that you speak the truth?" asked the sergeant.

"May the saints never pardon me, senor, if I speak not the truth. Ask the lady if he is not the one."

"Well thought of," cried the officer, with a nod of approbation. "Woman, look upon the man, and tell me if you ever saw him before?"

"Does the American senor desire me to tell all?" she asked, raising her voice, and looking me full in the face with her great, black eyes.

"I desire you to speak the truth," I said, answering for the first time.

"Well, I will do so; not for the purpose of saving my life, but yours. You followed me home, and I encouraged you to remain; the negro who was shot, the one who lies there wounded, and the one who sought safety by giving information that murder had been committed, were all leagued together for the purpose of robbery."

"*Diablo*, but this grows interesting," interrupted the sergeant. "Have you written all down?" addressing Francisco, who was writing.

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"All. Let her continue," was the answer.

"Go on, then."

"We had done such things before, and when resistance was made, Antonio and his companions have not hesitated to commit murder."

"It is a lie!" groaned the wounded man. "She is trying to shield her lover."

"Silence!" roared the sergeant. "Your time will come by and by."

"Antonio thought I had a fancy for the American gentleman, and he determined not only to rob him, but to take his life. I pleaded, in hopes that he would avoid shedding blood, and the negro half promised that my wish should be gratified. It was I who wished to fly with the senor, and leave the company in which he found me."

"Traitress!" groaned the wounded slave. "I wish that we had strangled you before we went up stairs."

"The American was not asleep, as they expected, and was armed, which was more than I anticipated. He saw two men enter his room, and used his pistol. I fled from the house for fear that he would kill me during his rage, and now I ask for no mercy for what I have done. Others may beg as they please; but as for myself, I can die, if necessary."

"By the saints, but this is a marvellous story!" exclaimed the sergeant.

"And you believe it — do you not?" asked Francisco.

The officer scratched his head, and then lighted a fresh cigar, two things which he was proficient in.

"Did I not tell you that we could throw some light upon the matter?" Francisco asked. "My friend told me the whole circumstance, and I informed him that he must return and give an account of the matter, or the Cuban police would find him, let him hide where he would. Was I not right?"

"Now, by the saints, but that is the first sensible word I have heard you utter to-night," cried the sergeant, swelling with pride. "He could only have escaped us by leaving the island, but it would never have answered for him to return. We are keen on a scent as a bloodhound."

Francisco laughed in a quiet manner, and his friends followed his example.

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"Well, what do you propose to do?" asked Francisco, after a moment's pause, addressing the sergeant.

"To take all the parties to Havana and lock them up," answered the sergeant, promptly.

"With two exceptions."

"Name them," cried the officer.

"My friend, the American, and the girl, both must go free."

"But don't you understand that they are implicated — that they must be tried?" remonstrated the sergeant.

"No, I don't understand any such thing, and you won't after hearing me a few moments. What crime has the woman committed? She entertained my friend, and no more. Did she raise her hand against him in any manner? Did she rob him? He has his money on his person, and makes no complaint. What has she done? Why, she is guilty of having too much beauty; but that is not a crime in a Spanish country. She is therefore evidently entitled to her discharge. This you cannot deny."

The sergeant resorted to his old dodge when he was puzzled. He scratched his head, and lighted a fresh cigar.

"In regard to my young friend here," Francisco continued, "he defended his life when attacked; and where is the Spaniard who would not do the same? If there is one in this room, let him speak?"

The soldiers murmured their applause, and the sergeant began to relax his rigid features. He looked at Francisco, and the latter looked steadily at the warrior.

"No, no, it won't do," murmured the soldier, in reply to some secret sign on the part of my friend. "I am willing to help you whenever I can, but in this instance the risk is too great."

"Bah! you are growing timid in your old age, I should judge, or else you don't know your own interests, nor care for those of the soldiers under your charge."

There was a movement on the part of the men that looked as though they were inclined to think the same way. The sergeant hesitated, but it was a feeble sort of hesitation that Francisco was determined to take advantage of.

"Come, let us have a quiet talk together in another room," my friend said, rising and taking the sergeant by the arm, and nodding to me to follow.

The soldier made no resistance, but he left orders that no one

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was to leave the house, or be admitted during his absence. As soon as we reached a room where we could be alone, Francisco opened the conversation.

"My friend," he said, "I am going to give you six ounces of gold for assisting us."

"I am sure I am glad to think that such is to be the case. One ounce I shall give to the saints, and the rest to the poor."

"Bah! you will give none to the saints, and all to the wine-shops; but that is no concern of ours. My friend here must go clear, and no suspicions created that he was ever concerned in this affair. You understand?"

The sergeant nodded and smiled. He even held out his hand for the money.

"Another condition is that the girl goes with us," added Francisco.

"*Diablo!* that is asking too much," muttered the soldier.

"Stupid! don't I leave the negroes, and all that you can find in the house. Are not two enough to satisfy justice? I have only to speak to your superiors, and what I ask would be done. You know it."

"By the saints, but what you say is true. Give me the money and go. Say nothing to the men. I will divide with them."

He turned to leave the room, but I detained him.

"If the girl refuses to go with me, I shall not ask for her release. Let that be understood between us."

"Of course. Make what bargain you please with her."

"Isadora," I said, "seating myself close beside her, so that no one could hear my remarks, "if I should pardon the wrong that you have done me, and should get your discharge, would you go with me?"

"I will," she replied, without the least hesitation.

"And will you be true to me?"

"May the saints curse me, if I am not," was her answer. "You are the only man I ever loved. I have sinned, but let my devotion to you atone for it. I will go with you."

"Well, what does the woman say?" interrupted the sergeant. "If she speaks at all, it must be quick. Time is precious."

"She will go with me," I answered.

I led Isadora to a carriage, the sergeant accompanying us with a lantern.

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"You need fear no more trouble in this case," the soldier said. "If our men should meet you on the street, they will not recognize you, but you must not feel offended on that score."

I promised that I would not, and with Isadora and Francisco in the volante, it started towards Havana. There was no conversation until the volante stopped at the head of the mole, where I got out and assisted Isadora to alight. Half a dozen boats were lying at the end of the mole, waiting for passengers, and I intended to take one and pull on board of the Coquette without delay, but a few words from Francisco altered my resolution.

"I don't want to persuade you to act against your will," he said, "but if you will follow my advice, it is to remain on shore, and see Murphy in the morning. He will not feel right to-night, and may say words that you will resent. I will take you to a quiet café, where you can feel at home, and act as you please."

I thought of the matter for a moment, and concluded that Francisco was right. We again entered the volante, and drove to a street that led to the Plaza. It was a narrow and unpretending looking thoroughfare, and the house before which we stopped had a cigar store on the ground floor, but the only customer was the proprietor, and he was puffing away most vigorously.

"Hallo, Don Sebastian," called Francisco, from the volante, "can you give a gentleman and lady quarters for a few days?"

Don Sebastian emitted one or two whiffs before he gained his feet and came towards us.

"Have you rooms unoccupied, Don Sebastian?" asked Francisco.

The cigar vender, instead of replying, looked hard at Isadora, and then at me, with his head on one side, and his cigar in full blast.

"Is he shipped?" asked the tobacconist, pointing with his cigar at me.

"Yes."

"Married?" he continued, nodding his head.

"How should I know?" Francisco replied.

"Hum — yes, I have rooms, as good as can be found in Havana. They can have them, cigars included, for thirty dollars a week. How is that? Is it not cheap?"

"I take them," I cried, getting out of the vehicle, and assisting Isadora.

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"Coffee or chocolate at seven, breakfast at ten, dinner at four, tea and coffee at nine," repeated the cigar man, with his head still on one side, and not the least excited at the acceptance of his terms,

"All right; lead the way to the room," I said.

He made no reply, but went off sideways in a thoughtful manner towards the rooms which we were to occupy.

Just at that moment a fierce cry was heard in the street, and we listened attentively.

"Death to the fillibusters!" was the yell; and it was taken up and shouted in the streets and from the windows, and from every wine and cigar shop that was open at that late hour.

We rushed to the windows, and even Isadora placed herself by my side, as though anxious to hear what was going on in the city.

"Death to *los Americanos!* Death to the fillibusters!" were the cries, howled out by poor wretches, who seemed to have started into life from the gutters, so ragged and fierce did they seem.

"Can you give me an explanation," I asked of Francisco.

"I suppose that a party of your countrymen has paid us a visit for the purpose of revolutionizing the island. Ah, there goes an acquaintance of mine. I will ask for the news."

He shouted to his friend, and the latter halted for a moment to answer.

"Five hundred fillibusters captured, and two hundred killed." And off the fellow went to report in some other quarter.

"My countrymen are unfortunate," I said. "I must act as an American, and see what I can do for them. Will you go with me?" I asked of Francisco.

"No," he replied, very quietly, "for we could do no good, and you might injure yourself much. It is no time for Americans to be seen on the streets. Do you hear that cry?"

"Death to the Americans! Death to the fillibusters!" was shouted in the street.

I could not help confessing that what my friend had said was true, and I relinquished my plan of seeking the fillibusters. We left the window to drink coffee, which my landlord had placed on the table, but still in the streets we could hear that terrible cry, —

"Death to the Americans! Death to the fillibusters!"

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"I will call during the forenoon," Francisco said, after taking a cup of coffee, "and in the mean time I wish you much happiness. Good night."

He was gone, and Isadora and myself were left alone, for the landlord had retired to his shop, and was carrying on a brisk trade.

CHAPTER VI.

GARROTING FILLIBUSTERS. — DEATH OF LOPEZ. — GETTING READY FOR SAILING. — A ROW, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

It was about six o'clock the next morning when the tobacconist knocked at my door, and informed me that coffee was on the table, and awaited my pleasure. I took no notice, so at nine o'clock there was a pounding upon the door that did not resemble the gentle knocks of my landlord. It was Murphy; but how had he discovered my retreat at so early an hour?

"What brings you on shore?" I asked.

"Why, to tell you the news. A party of fillibusters has been taken, down on the east coast, and half a dozen of them are to be garroted on the Plaza this forenoon. Do you want to see the execution, or had you rather stay away?"

"At what time does it take place?" I asked.

"At eleven, and it is half past nine now. Soldiers are already marching to the Plaza, and taking up positions."

"I will go with you, but first sit down and take a cup of coffee with me. By that time I shall be ready," I replied.

"But where is the female? Where is the craft that hoisted false colors, and led you into the enemy's harbor? Let me have a fair look at her figure-head and build."

Just that moment Isadora, looking as beautiful as Venus, entered the room. The captain started to his feet, and bowed in silent admiration. He supposed that she was some lady connected with the house.

"Say, Robert," the captain exclaimed, in a whisper; "what a figure-head and hull! Blast me if she ain't a full rigged clipper, and no mistake. What a run, and what counters!"

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"How would you like to sail with such a craft?" I asked.

"O Lord!" he groaned, "the thought of it takes my breath away. If she would say splice, I would give a year's pay, and think myself a happy man."

'And you would leave the sea?" I asked.

"No, I don't say that I would do that; but I would take her with me, and never lose sight of her."

"Captain," I said, taking Isadora by the hand, and speaking in Spanish, "let me introduce to you my affinity."

"Your what?" roared Murphy.

"My affinity," I repeated.

"Your affinity? And what in the devil's name is that?"

"Why, the girl for whom I have a warm attachment, and who has the same for me."

"Humph — that's affinity, is it? Well, I've heard it called by many names, but if affinity only brings you together, I s'pose that it's as good a name as any."

The captain, while drinking his coffee, could not remove his eyes from Isadora's face.

"Well," he said, at length, "you have taken a prize, and I should value her more than a hundred niggers, in prime order. But now that you have got her, what are you going to do with her?"

This was the topic which I had desired to broach.

"I will tell you what I propose to do," I said at length, speaking slow and distinct. "I intend to resign my berth on board the Coquette, and enjoy myself on shore."

"The devil you do!" cried the captain, turning very red in the face.

"Wouldn't you do the same thing?" I asked.

"No, by thunder! I would not ruin myself for any woman living. Are you crazy? Ain't you making money ten times as fast as you can make it in the merchant service?"

The captain grew warm, and walked the room as though upon the quarter-deck of the Coquette. Isadora did not understand the English language, but she knew that we were talking about her, and she came and placed herself by my side, and leaned upon my shoulder.

"Hullo! Darn me, if she is not beating up to windward," Murphy said, looking at the very pleasing picture which we formed.

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"That is the way we shall always sail together," I replied; "for a good consort to fall back upon, is like a port in a storm."

The captain took a seat at the table, and called for a third cup of coffee.

"Are you really in earnest in this matter?" he asked; "or what do you want? More pay? If so, say the word, and you shall have it. But don't leave me in this way, 'cos I like you; and recollect how you stuck to me when that old elephant was close upon my heels. Say what you want."

"Well, in the first place, I won't part with Isadora at any rate."

"Go on," growled the captain, grinding his teeth, and suppressing an oath.

"In the next place, if I go in the Coquette, Isadora will go with me."

"The devil she will!" thundered Murphy, with a start of astonishment.

"On no other grounds will I leave Havana."

The captatn sprung to his feet, and walked the room, without speaking a word.

"Well, your answer?" I said, quite calmly.

"But think of the danger that she will be exposed to. Fever and bloodshed are not pleasing companions for a woman," Murphy replied.

"She is willing to endure all for my sake," I answered.

"Then for Heaven's sake, let her go with us; but she must pass as your sister or wife, to prevent the crew from being uncivil."

I told Isadora the result of the interview, and then took my hat. She hung upon my arm, and around my neck, as though she feared to trust my person from her presence, even for a moment.

"Do you forgive me for my conduct yesterday?" she asked.

"Of course I do," I replied, pressing her to my heart, and kissing her red lips.

"And you will ever love me?" she whispered.

"Always," I said, most fervently; and I thought so at the time, and was sincere in what I then said.

I took Murphy's arm, and we reached the street.

"Tell me, in the name of all that is good and holy, how you have managed to make that girl love you so?"

I laughed, and made no reply.

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"I envy you," Murphy continued.

"I have no doubt of it."

"Francisco told me this morning something of your pranks last night. Now give me the whole account."

As we walked along through the streets, which were crowded with people, all hurrying towards the Plaza, I gave Murphy a detailed statement of the matter. We drifted along with the current, sometimes meeting with scowling faces, and being sharply scrutinized by wretches who would have shed our blood as freely as water if they had known we were Americans. But it was for our interest to pass as Englishmen; and whenever a Cuban, more inquisitive than his fellows, questioned us, we would give them a specimen of British impudence, and it was satisfactory.

We could hear cries of "Death to the fillibusters — death!" even from the Plaza, and we could see the crowd surging to and fro, while long lines of bayonets glittered in the sun, and the strains of a military band could be heard, when not drowned by the fierce shouts of the crowd, who were thirsting for blood, and would liked to have seen it run in torrents through the streets. We made our way slowly through the crowd, taking good care to offend no one if possible; but just as we reached the building which fronted the Plaza, where Murphy had secured seats at a window, a dark, long-haired wretch, with torn shirt and blood-shot eyes, rushed towards us.

"You are Americans!" he shouted, stepping in front of us, and flourishing a long knife.

The cry attracted attention, and in a second we were in the centre of a confused group, every man of them carrying a knife that looked as though sharpened expressly for murderous work.

"We are Englishmen," I replied, as calmly as possible.

"Death to the Americans! Death to the fillibusters!" cried the man who had first obstructed our path.

The crowd re-echoed the cries, and pressed towards us, flourishing their knives.

"Death to the Americans!" shouted the leader of the gang; and aimed a blow at Murphy's breast, which would have taken effect had I not struck up his arm, while the knife passed over the captain's shoulder.

In an instant Murphy grasped the fellow around his waist, raised him from the ground as easily as though he was a child,

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and dashed him upon his advancing comrades, who suddenly recoiled under the shock, and thus gave us a few minutes' time to prepare ourselves for the attack which we anticipated.

"Death to the Americans — death!" was the cry, as the fellow picked himself from the gutter, and sought for his knife which, fortunately, had fallen from his hand.

"Death to the Americans!" the crowd responded; and bright blades glittered in the sun, and were waved menacingly towards us.

We had our revolvers in our pockets, but we knew what the penalty would be if we used them. Once I thought that I would test the efficiency of gunpowder and ball, and fire upon the advancing ruffians; but Murphy stopped me.

"It ain't time for the barkers," he said. "If we must sell our lives, we can do so by and by. Let me see if I can't manage them first."

We edged away so that we got our backs to the wall, and thus prevented an attack in the rear; and when we saw that the crowd was encircling us, and gradually drawing nearer and nearer, the most cowardly among them, gathering courage from our quiescent state, Murphy thought that the time had arrived for him to speak.

"Cubans," he shouted, "we are Englishmen, and belong to the man-of-war now in port. Beware how you lay a finger upon the queen's subjects. Our deaths will be fearfully avenged."

The ruffians stopped in their advanced course, and looked at each other for counsel.

"Cry death to the fillibusters, and we shall believe you," the ruffian, whom Murphy had overthrown, said.

"Is that all you want?" the captain bellowed. "Don't you see that we are of your mind, by being here to witness the death of the rascals. What more would you have?"

"Nothing more. We are friends with the English."

The ruffians left us to pursue our course, but we could hear them shout at various times as they sought for victims.

We passed up a flight of steps, and knocked at a door, which was opened by a Cuban, who was old, gray, and wrinkled.

"You are late, senors," he said, as we entered.

"Yes; a few of your countrymen took it into their heads that our hides wanted ventilating," Murphy replied.

"The boys are lively this morning," the Cuban said, with a grim smile; and offered us cigars and a glass of wine.

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There was a sudden shout, like the howl of wild beasts, from the crowd, and we looked from a window and saw what occasioned it.

In the centre of the Plaza a large platform had been erected during the night, and on it were four upright posts, or what resembled the same from the position we occupied. Around this platform was a regiment of soldiers. They were drawn up in the form of a square; and what was singular, instead of facing the platform, the troops fronted the crowd, and held their muskets ready loaded and bayonets in place.

The noise which attracted our attention was the entrance upon the Plaza of a second regiment of foot, escorting four prisoners, who were pinioned and guarded by double lines of soldiers on each side. Near each of the unfortunate fillibusters walked bareheaded priests, who were endeavoring to administer the last rites of their religious creed. But there was one prisoner, a tall, dark man, with erect form and undaunted bearing, who seemed to pay but slight attention to his ghostly confessor.

"Death to the fillibusters — death!" roared the mighty crowd; and it swayed to and fro, all anxious to get a glimpse of General Lopez, whose name had caused such terror throughout the island but a few days before, when he had landed with but a handful of men, and with scant material, for the purpose of giving freedom of speech and liberty to the Cubans; while the return that was made him was desertion and execrations of contempt.

As those sounds, issuing from ten thousand throats, struck the ear of the leader, his step grew more confident, his bearing more bold. He cast looks of the deepest contempt upon the rabble, and even smiled when one ruffian shouted the information that his death was to be speedy and terrible. His three companions also showed their fearlessness by walking without faltering, but they seemed more intent upon the words of the priest than earthly affairs.

"Do you see him?" whispered the old Cuban, whose room we occupied, speaking to Murphy.

"Of course I do," was the answer.

"Does he quail — does he falter? God help him, and strengthen him. I cannot see him, for my eyes are dim, and have lost the power of their youth. Tell me how he looks."

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The old man's eyes were indeed dim, but not with age. Tears flowed from them, and obscured his sight.

"He looks like a man who is not afraid to die," was Murphy's reply.

"Does he look at the crowd as though he sought the face of a friend?" the old Cuban asked.

"He often squints this way, as though expecting a squall. But he makes no sign that he ever knew a face before."

"He is looking for me," cried the old man, starting up and walking the room impatiently. "I told him that I would receive him on the Plaza with ten thousand men. Alas! the men are there, but not the kind I expected. We have been deceived, and money and blood have been wasted without any good result. Woe is me! I should have known better. Deceived — deceived."

"Death to the fillibusters — death!" was the roar that ascended to our window.

"And these men want liberty," muttered the old man, with a shudder. "Thank the saints, all are not like them. If they were I should despair. No, some on the island must be sincere."

Murphy looked at the old man with an expression of pity, but made no remark. Again the drums resounded and the Cuban showed his anxiety to know the meaning of the noise.

"The chief is attempting to speak, but the drums drown his voice, and the crowd hears not a word," I said.

"The cowards! they fear that his words will burn like fire, and change the hearts of his enemies."

The drums suddenly ceased, and the old man raised his head quickly, with an inquiring look.

"Has he ceased to speak?" he asked.

"He has, and all the prisoners have taken their seats," replied Murphy.

"Go on," gasped the Cuban.

"They adjust iron bands around their necks, and executioners are waiting for the signal. The crowd is now silent as death, anxious to feast their eyes upon the dying struggles of the prisoners. A mother holds her child aloft, so that its young eyes may witness the spectacle, as though it was one of pleasure. There is the signal. The executioners turn their levers. The chief and his comrades are dead," Murphy said, turning from the window with a sigh.

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The Cuban made no reply. He was upon his knees, praying and weeping as though his heart would break.

"Courage, man," the captain said, laying a hand lightly upon his shoulder, "With the death of Lopez, all hope of freedom for Cuba is not lost. His blood is but seed. It will spring up, and yet flourish."

The old man rocked his body to and fro, and groaned.

"But I was true," he said, at length, looking up; "I did not desert him in his hour of extremity. You know that I offered last night ten thousand dollars if his guards would permit his escape. But they refused me. You know that. Say that you know that I have done my duty, and that no stain rests upon my name."

"You have done more than your duty," Murphy said, soothingly. "If all were like you, I should have no fear. But, unfortunately, they are not. Now keep quiet, and save your strength and money until a fitting moment arrives; and when it does, I hope I shall be found on your side."

"Your advice is good, and I will think much of it," the Cuban replied, after a short silence. "The saints have you in their keeping, senors."

He bowed us out of the room as though he longed to be alone.

"Who is the old gentleman?" I asked of Murphy, when we had gained the street, and were walking in the direction of my lodging.

"That is Don Alberto," my companion replied, sinking his voice to a whisper, so that the crowd could not overhear the reply. "He has spent thousands of dollars for the cause, and would spend thousands more if a definite result were promised, or even hinted at. He is worth, or was, three millions of dollars; but he is reckless of his property while pursuing the phantom which he is in search of."

"He has lost a son in the cause," I said.

"Not in the cause; but that loss was one thing which urged him to seek independence for Cuba. His son was executed for too freely using his tongue against the present government. He was a gallant young fellow, and died like a hero."

"You have served the old man some time or other," I said.

"Well, yes; I did do a few things which helped him, and I got my pay for all that I did."

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By this time we were near my lodging, and my heart beat quickly at the thought of again meeting Isadora, although I had been parted from her but three hours.

"You young dog," the captain said, "you are trembling like a topsail half sheeted home. You have taken the bait, hook and sinker; but hang me if she is not worthy of your love as far as good looks are concerned, for a prettier figure-head I never saw."

We met the tobacconist at the door, still smoking a cigar, and carrying his head on one side, as usual.

"Ah, senors," he said, "glad to see you. Breakfast is all ready, and has been for an hour. Saw the execution, I suppose. Did they die easy? Sad fate, but a just one. No fillibusters can live on the soil of Cuba. We are happy as we are. Plenty of cigars, *dulces*, fruit, and wine. What more can we ask for?"

"Too much," muttered Murphy. "You lead such lazy lives that no chance for noble thoughts can find entrance to your bosoms. A few more storms would put energy in your blood."

At the head of the stairs was Isadora. She had heard my voice, and came to greet me. She caught sight of my face, smiled, and opened her arms. I bounded up the stairs, clasped her to my bosom, and covered her face with kisses.

The captain was easily persuaded to remain and take breakfast; and the landlord had not spoken unadvisedly, when he said that he would please our palates with something to eat of an agreeable description. Murphy, whose appetite was sharpened by a long fast, did justice to the fare that was spread before him, and made himself as agreeable as possible.

"I have one piece of pleasing information," Murphy said, as we lighted our cigars. "I have managed to get rid of Ruez, and when we sail he will be left behind. This will give us more room in the cabin, and I'm certain will be agreeable to yourself and sister."

This was the first time that the captain had called Isadora my sister, and I must confess that I blushed lightly when the word was pronounced; for much as I loved my mistress, still, for a family relation, I considered that another sort of person would be preferable.

The captain, having some important duty to attend to, left us, and his place was supplied by Francisco, who called to congratulate us, and inquire after our healths.

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As we were expecting to sail the next day, I considered that it was incumbent upon me to make a few arrangements for the comfort of Isadora. There were many things to be purchased, and many little luxuries to be obtained, which I knew would prove acceptable at sea; as I consulted her happiness as much as my own, I ordered a volante, and we drove to several shops where female apparel was to be obtained ready made. From the milliner's we visited the *dulce* vendor, and here Isadora was in her element. Like all women, she preferred something sweet to the substantial fare of life, and ordered sweetmeats enough to have a daily supply during the voyage; then we concluded to take a short ride over the city, and see as much of it as possible during my short stay on shore.

"Isadora," I said, as we drove along through the streets on our way to the country, "you have not told me your history, or whether you have friends residing in Havana. Now is a good opportunity to confide in me. Tell me all. Faults and misfortunes will be excused by one who loves you as I do."

"I have neither parents nor friends," she said. "I was left alone in the world at the age of five, and from that time until the present I have been restless and dissatisfied with myself. I was received in the house of a lady of this city after the death of my parents; and my work consisted in taking care of children, and making myself their slave. For six years I resided with her family, but was compelled to leave her house, because her husband, a man old enough to be my grandfather, one day insulted me with improper liberties, so his conduct was reported to his wife. Me she blamed, and not the person who should have protected me. I was summoned to her presence, and loaded with reproaches for my ingratitude, and was even threatened with chastisement for listening to words which I had no power to prevent being uttered.

"I brooded over my wrongs, young as I was, and studied for revenge upon my haughty mistress; and at length I had it. Before many days after the scene which I have described, my master, Don Bazan, again pestered me with his attentions; but this time he was more circumspect and cautious in his advances. He chose opportunities when no one was present to watch his proceedings, and report them to his wife. Will you believe me, I dissembled, and so took my first lessons in deception. I pretended to encourage Don Bazan, and even listened to his

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proposals, but never promised him, or gave him an opportunity to surprise me, and take by force that which he could not obtain by persuasion. I will not tell you how many times I escaped by my watchfulness, how many times a cup of drugged wine was offered me and thrown away, how even fruit was tampered with, and placed in my way in hopes that I should be overcome, and thereby fall an easy prey to an old man's passion and depravity. Even in the latter attempt the blow recoiled upon the head of the framer of the project; for one of his children ate heartily of the doctored fruit, was seized with convulsions, and died a miserable death. There was no investigation, but I could see by the Don's face he was fearful of an inquiry, and therefore hurried the interment ceremonies as fast as possible. But an old man's passion is stronger than a young man's love, and even after the death of his child I did not escape his attentions. I encouraged him and coquetted with him until he grew desperate, and was ready to sacrifice home and wife for me. For this I had waited, and when all was ready for the denouement, I informed his wife, led her disguised in my clothes to a rendezvous to wait for her husband, and then, with the money and jewels which the Don had given me, fled from his house, and commenced my career as a child of fortune."

The volante passed the barriers of the city, and was on the road leading to the house where I had introduced myself to Isadora. I would have avoided the scene of the tragedy, but it was too late. I had been so engaged with the lady's history that I had not noticed the road which the driver took, and it was not until we were directly opposite the house that Isadora caught a glimpse of it.

"O, my friend!" she cried, "why did you bring me here? Do I not already suffer for my past deeds?"

She grew calm at length, and then told me how she happened to become an inmate of the house.

"After I fled from the residence of Don Bazan, I engaged myself as waiter in a confectionery establishment; but before I had remained there two weeks, from some unknown source whispers regarding my reputation were circulated, and I was compelled to leave. I tried my fortune in other places, but still I was driven from them by the same whispers which I could not trace to any source. I grew mad with the world, and desperate; and while I

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was in that state of mind a rich Spaniard saw me, loved me, and made proposals. I accepted, and was no longer able to pray to the saints to have me in their keeping. For three years I remained with my friend, and then death left me once more free, but still not so destitute as when I had met my protector. He left me a small sum of money and a few jewels; and while I was deliberating what I should do, Antonio, whose freedom had been granted at the death of my friend and his master, made proposals which I first rejected, but at length accepted. Of the dark deeds committed by them I have some knowledge. I interceded for you, because I took a fancy to you, but with little thought that our acquaintance was to be continued. I have now told you all — my faults and my sins, and I hope that by so doing I have lost none of your respect, or what is of more importance, your love."

Of course I protested that she had not.

Upon reaching our lodgings, the tobacconist handed me a letter from Murphy, stating that the schooner would sail the next day, and hinting that if I was disposed to invest a few hundred dollars in articles for traffic, I could do so with his full consent. I thought of the matter, and concluded that my money would be safer on land than sea; and as I had but little time for action, I visited my banker, and made arrangements that all the funds which he held for me should be sent to the United States, and consigned to the hands of a friend whom I could trust, and who would do as well by me as he would for himself. That part of my duties over, I returned to my rooms, and dined in company with Isadora and my friend Francisco.

Francisco did not wish to remain long, probably from motives of delicacy. I pressed him strongly to stop through the evening, and at length he consented, provided we would visit the Tacon Theatre, and witness the opera which was being performed at that establishment, and attracting the most fashionable society. I should have declined, had I not observed, by the expression of Isadora's eyes, that she was delighted at the idea, and on questioning her, I found her eyes were but the mirrors of her heart.

We found our seats were in a very commanding position of the house, and took possession of them in a quiet manner, and adjusted ourselves for an evening's entertainment. Unfortunately, however, for that plan, four English naval officers entered the

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box next to us, and took seats. I saw at a glance that the men had been dining late, and drinking freely; and knowing the character of the English in foreign countries, I gave up all hope of comfort or amusement for that evening, and I was not disappointed; for hardly had the Britons taken their seats, and stared around the house, than their glances fell upon Isadora.

"Blast me, Fred, but that is a pretty face — here in the box next to us. Look at her."

The speaker spoke in English to his companions, so that Francisco and Isadora did not understand him; but I did, and listened, without seeming to.

"Curse me, if you ain't right. She is some on upper works, and no mistake. Who is she?"

"Don't know — would like to."

For a while the officers confined themselves to their own affairs, and talked about the superior qualities of their vessel — her rapid sailing, and how easy it would be to whip one or two Yankee ships on the station; but as time passed it produced no effect in diminishing their intoxication.

"Come," said Francisco, "let us leave the theatre. We can no longer enjoy the opera with those unmanly dogs chatting in our ears.

"We will not be driven from the theatre by their noise," I said. "Isadora is too interested in the opera for us to leave at the present time. If we could find another box I would change quarters, but I won't be driven from the theatre by three or four Englishmen."

"It is not the Englishmen whom I fear," replied Francisco, "but the disturbance that will occur."

We spoke in whispers, so that Isadora should not hear and become alarmed, but we miscalculated, for she caught the last part of our conversation, and with woman's curiosity begged to know what the officers had said.

"They merely said that you were pretty," I replied.

"And you are not offended with them for that?" she asked.

"No more than yourself," I said, secretly amused at the manner in which she had found consolation in being called handsome.

I looked upon the blooming face of Isadora, and wished that the tenor's lungs would fail, or the prima donna have a fit

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of sulks so that we could return home. But the very method I adopted to pass away time, and avoid a quarrel with the Englishmen, was the means of provoking one; for one of the officers, seeing that I was so entirely occupied with the lady, called the attention of his comrades to the fact.

"Look at the fellow," said one, whom they called Fred; "he is struck with a Spanish mildew, and can't sheer from one side to the other."

"He is fearful that some one will board his prize, and carry her off before his eyes," said another.

"What countryman is he?" asked Fred.

"A Frenchman, I will bet," one replied.

"No, he is a Spaniard; with an Englishman for a father. Recollect our ships have been on this station for many years, and who can resist an Englishman in full uniform?"

The scamps laughed at this rally, as though it was witty. I manifested no sign that I heard anything, but I began to feel a little warm in the region of my heart.

"You do not listen to the opera," said Isadora.

"No, I am still thinking of you," was my reply.

She pouted a little and laughed, and that was observed by our friends on the left.

"She has a smile that would thaw a man, even if he had stood double watch while going upon the coast of England in the winter," said one.

"But the fact is, I don't like such a smile," Fred said, in a languid manner.

"Why not?" asked his brother officer, in some surprise.

"Because it is too inviting," was the reply.

"How so? — explain yourself," was the universal cry.

"Why, don't you see that she has caught a glimpse of my face, and she is dying to become acquainted with me?" was the puppy's affected remark.

There was such a laugh at this vanity, that the audience in the theatre cried out with vexation, and a number hissed.

"Do you hear that, Fred?" one of them said. "The people are hissing you."

"Which proves that they are geese, and understand nothing but garlic and onions. Let them hiss and be hanged. I can stand it as long as they can."

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The audience, intent upon the music, soon forgot the Englishmen in the strains of a powerful tenor. Then the officers once more found their tongues.

"I tell you, sirs, the lady admires me," Fred continued. "Half a dozen times she has flashed her eyes upon me like diamonds. I am never mistaken."

"Nonsense, man!" a brother officer said, who seemed older and more grave than the others. "You must be mistaken."

"I tell you what I will do," Fred said. "I can convince you that I speak understandingly. I will take a flower from the lass's head, and she will not chide me for the loss."

"But her lover will," cried the lieutenant. "He looks as though capable of doing work if roused. You had better do nothing of the kind."

"O, let Russell alone — can't you?" the other officer cried. "He is only talking, and would not take such liberties when there is a fair prospect of getting his ears boxed. The lady has not looked at him, and don't know that there is such a person in the world."

Russell's brother officers seemed desirous of urging the fellow on for the purpose of seeing the fun; for such they seemed to consider it; with the exception of one called Horton, who appeared to be more sober, and have more sense than the others.

"Blast me if I stand such chaffing as this!" Fred cried. "Just keep your eyes on me and see if I don't do the trick, and no words about the matter either."

The fellow moved nearer the box in which Isadora and myself were seated, as though about to carry his threat into execution. Without pretending to notice his movements, I edged towards him in such a manner that I was brought directly behind the lady, and between Francisco and the Englishmen. I kept one eye upon the movements of Russell, and saw that he was deliberating which rose from the lady's head he should pluck, and while he was thus undecided Horton once more spoke to him.

"Fred," he said, "let me persuade you to desist from your foolish scheme. Trouble will arise, I am sure, for I see something in that fellow's eyes that tells me he is a Tartar."

"He is a snob," cried Fred, "and I'll soon show you that such is the case. Watch my motions."

He reached over as he spoke, and was about to pluck the rose

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from Isadora's hair; but I had watched him most narrowly, and as soon as his hand was within a few inches of Isadora's head, so that I could be certain of his intentions, I suddenly started into life. Grasping his wrist as firmly as though it was in a vice, I gave it a sudden wrench and threw his arm out of joint. Then before he could recover from his astonishment I pulled him towards me, and struck him three heavy blows upon his face. Every blow brought blood, and raised large ridges of discolored flesh.

The eyes of every one in the house were directed towards us, and many people rose to their feet for the purpose of seeing what the trouble was about; but before they could bring their opera glasses to bear upon us the difficulty, as far as I was concerned, was over.

Isadora had started to her feet in alarm when the first blow was struck, but at a word from me she resumed her seat, and although trembling somewhat, she manifested no further emotion, and appeared to direct her whole attention to the stage. So sudden was the attack that Francisco could only look on and wonder.

The English officers rose hastily, and moved towards the door of their box without saying a word, and in a few minutes the audience had forgotten that a disturbance had occurred, so engrossed were they with the opera.

"Bravo!" cried Francisco, as the Englishmen showed their backs. "You have driven the ruffians from the house, and with but little trouble. Now we can enjoy the balance of the opera in peace."

I had my doubts on the subject, but did not think it worth while to communicate them to my friend just at that moment.

At length the curtain fell, and the vast audience rose to depart. I gave my arm to Isadora, and we left the box. As I expected, I saw one of the English officers standing near the door, and a quick glance showed me that it was Mr. Horton, who had endeavored to persuade Russell not to act the silly part which he had carried out a few minutes before. I pretended not to notice him, and passed slowly along, but before I reached the stairs I was gently touched on the shoulder. I looked round, and saw Mr. Horton.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, with a bow and a smile, "but may I request your card?"

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"Pardon me," I said, "but I am quite out of cards."

"Your name and residence will do as well," was the answer.

I gave him my name and residence, and he bowed and left me.

Just before we reached the volante I whispered to Francisco, and requested him to go in search of Murphy, and bring him to my lodgings without delay.

"My friend," Isadora said, as soon as we entered the volante, and were driving towards our lodgings, "there is some secret which you have not confided to me. Tell me all."

"It is nothing," I replied, "excepting that the man who was so fierce as to insult you and me, and was punished for it, is desirous of challenging me."

"And you will meet him?" she asked.

"Certainly, if the officer feels aggrieved at the blows which he has received, I am bound to satisfy him."

She sighed, but remained silent.

"Do you not approve of my resolution?" I asked.

"No; but nothing that I could say would prevent you from doing as you pleased."

Our landlord received us with a cloud of smoke, and his head more on one side than ever.

"Coffee on the table," he said, "and a piece of cold chicken."

He escorted us to our rooms, and I had hardly exchanged my black coat for a light one, when Murphy and Francisco entered.

"I caught the captain just as he was taking a boat to go on board, and have brought him with me," the Cuban said; "and although he grumbled somewhat at being compelled to sleep on shore, he won't lose his sea legs."

"What in the devil's name does all this mean?" Murphy asked. "Francisco has told me that you was insulted by a party of Englishmen, and that you knocked one of 'em down. So far so good. That made you even. What more can happen?"

"Nothing, unless the fellow chooses to request a meeting, in which case I couldn't very well refuse him, could I?" I asked.

"Do you think that he means fight?" Murphy asked.

"I am certain of it," I replied.

"Then, by the piper that played before Moses, you must give him one!" exclaimed the captain, heartily.

"But we were to sail to-morrow," I suggested.

"I will postpone it until this affair is settled. I can make a

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dozen excuses that will serve the agents. You must fight if they want you to, and what is more, you must, for the honor of the Coquette, come out of the matter with flying colors. I'll be your second, and show you how things are managed."

"The supper is cooling, senors," said the tobacconist, who had been dancing around the room for a few minutes, nervous with the idea that we should forget his cheer.

"We can eat and talk at the same time," I said, drawing near the table, and inviting my guests to join me.

"Well, I don't mind having a little snack of somethin' at this late hour," the captain said; and after complimenting Isadora, he fell to, like a lion. "You are sure they can find the house?" the captain asked.

"O, yes; I think there is no chance for a mistake," I replied.

"If there was, I would start out and find the party," the captain said, in a musing tone.

I thanked him for his kindness, but can't say that I fully appreciated it. Before there was a chance to discuss the point, I heard the landlord coming up stairs, escorting some one who spoke in English.

"Here comes our man," said Murphy; and he was right, for the officer who had asked for my address, Mr. Horton, made his appearance.

I shook hands with him, and invited him to take a seat, which he did.

"I presume that you expected me," he said.

"I certainly did," I replied.

"These things should be settled in as quiet and quick a manner as possible," Mr. Horton continued, in an indifferent sort of manner, as though duels were of common occurrence with him.

I bowed, and remained silent.

"My friend, Mr. Russell, was quite anxious that a meeting should take place to-night, so eager is he to revenge the injuries he has received, but we managed to pacify him. We did this, thinking that you might have a little writing and a few arrangements to make before an exchange of shots."

"It was certainly very kind on your part," I replied, with the utmost *sang froid;* "but I am really sorry that you did not yield your wishes to those of Mr. Russell. These trifling things should be settled on the spot, or if that is impossible, within half an hour

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after the blows have passed. I think that it is not too late, even now, for the meeting to take place."

I heard a suppressed chuckle from Murphy, which sounded as though he had swallowed a cup of coffee the wrong way, and was strangling in consequence.

The Englishman looked at me in astonishment, and evidently thought that he had made a slight mistake. I remained quite cool, and determined to brag about promptness as hard as he did.

"I fear that it is too late," Mr. Horton said, looking at his watch. "It is now twelve o'clock, and dark. The early morning will have to answer."

"As you please. One time is as good as another for me. Only let the hour be as soon as possible."

The Englishman took a good long stare at me in astonishment.

"May I ask," he said, "what countryman you are? I suppose a Frenchman."

I shook my head.

"Certainly not a German."

"No."

"You speak the English language so plain you might pass for one of our queen's subjects," Mr. Horton continued.

"I thank fortune that I am not an Englishman," I replied, and then assuming my most dignified look, I answered, "I have the honor of being an American."

The officer looked surprised, and somewhat perplexed.

"If I had known that you were an American, sir, I could have prevented this trouble," Mr. Horton cried, at length.

"I have requested the services of a friend," I said, "and he will arrange all preliminaries with you as soon as he has finished a cup of coffee. Or, perhaps you will take a seat at the table and talk with him, and sip a cup of coffee yourself. You will find the beverage to your taste."

The Englishman hesitated; but just at that moment Isadora retired to her room, and Murphy came towards us. I introduced the gentlemen. They shook hands like old friends, and Murphy renewed my invitation, which Horton no longer refused to accept. They went to a table, and Francisco was presented in due form, but, owing to his limited amount of English, was not requested to retire.

I left the parties engaged in an animated discussion, and sought

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Isadora. A few minutes later some one knocked at the door of our room, and upon opening it, I found Murphy.

"I have arranged matters to my satisfaction," he said. "You are to meet to-morrow morning, just outside of the city. A sweet spot, where no interruption can take place."

"And the weapons?" I asked.

"We were the challenged party, and had the right to choose them. I named rifles, for I saw you shoot on the Gabun."

"Good! It is a weapon that I am familiar with. What is the distance?"

"Forty yards."

"That is a fair distance. How do we fire?"

"At the words one, two, three — fire."

"And the Englishman is satisfied?"

"Far from it. He said that his principal was not much acquainted with rifles, and would prefer pistols or swords. But I insisted upon rifles, and he was compelled to come to it, or go without fighting. I don't think that they are eager for a meeting, for somehow Horton thinks that you are right and Russell is wrong."

This was good news, and I said as much to Murphy.

"You must bring the rifles from the schooner, for I doubt if they have any on board of the Scorpion," I said.

"Don't bother your head on that score. Francisco and myself will see that everything is ship-shape and Bristol fashion.

The captain closed the door, and I was not sorry that he was gone, for I needed a few hours' time to collect my thoughts, and arrange them for the meeting which was to come off. I sat down and wrote a few letters to friends in the United States, and then wrote a statement of my effects, and bequeathed everything, excepting a few presents, to Isadora. I left directions for Murphy to see that my wishes were carried out, and by the time I had finished, it was near two o'clock in the morning. I hoped to get a few hours' rest, so threw myself upon my bed, and think I slept, for I was aroused by a gentle knock at my door, and upon opening it saw Murphy and Francisco.

"It is time that you are stirring," said the former, "although I hate to rouse out a man at such an hour."

"I will be with you in a moment," I replied, softly, for Isadora had not awakened, and I did not wish to disturb her.

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"We've got a kettle of hot coffee ready," Murphy said, "and a cup of it will do you good. It will clear the cobwebs from your eyes, and make your head feel as lively as a schooner in ballast in a stiff gale off Cape Hatteras."

I commenced dressing with exceeding care, and, according to Murphy's directions, all in black, not even allowing so much as the bosom of my shirt to be seen, so that my opponent could find nothing to take aim at. While I was thus engaged, Isadora awoke, but did not speak, although I knew that she was noting all my preparations with anxious eyes. Just as I was about to leave the room, with a trembling voice she begged that I would remain at home, or at least allow her to accompany me to the field. I could do neither; but I kissed her most affectionately, and then gently released her arms which were entwined around my neck as though they had been riveted together, with a final blessing, left her, crying as though her heart would break.

"How do you feel this morning?" the captain asked, as I made my appearance at the table.

"Composed and anxious to finish the business which is before me," I replied.

"Do your nerves tremble?" he asked.

"See for yourself," I answered, filling a cup of coffee so full that another drop would have overrun it.

I held the cup up for inspection, and yet not a drop went over the rim.

"That will do," said Murphy, with a nod of approval.

The coffee was soon disposed of, and cigars were lighted by all excepting myself. To me Murphy did not pass them.

"Why this neglect?" I asked.

"Your nerves," he answered.

"I'll risk the nerves; give me the cigars."

He would have remonstrated; but just at that moment the volante drove up to the door, and the captain was too busy attending to the departure to speak.

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CHAPTER VII.

EARLY MORNING. — A DUEL AND ITS RESULTS. — A NICE DISTINCTION. — OFF TO SEA. — A LITTLE HARBOR EPISODE.

We passed the outskirts of the city, and soon left the houses behind, with the exception of a few villas, which were scattered along the road, and surrounded by orange groves, and elegant gardens of flowers and pines. Once in a while we could see a pair of black eyes gazing at us from the windows of a villa, and it was noticed that a handsome face, in which the eyes were set, received the utmost attention from our party. In fact, Murphy went so far as to kiss his hand to several ladies, who had the curiosity to peer at us from balconies; an attention that caused Francisco to roar with laughter, and the lady who was the recipient of the favor to smile and blush, as though not knowing whether to be offended or pleased.

"What in the devil's name are you laughing at?" roared Murphy, just after he had saluted, turning to Francisco.

"At the manner in which you make love. You seem to have but little regard for age or sex, for I just saw you kiss your hand to a boy with a white shirt, intead of a lady with a night dress," Francisco said.

"Did I?" roared the captain. "Then tell the driver to tack ship, and stand back, and say that it was a mistake."

But the captain's request was not complied with, for we feared to spend the time necessary to perform the business; and as we were within half a mile of the place of meeting, the captain's thoughts were changed from females to the work before him.

"We have reached the ground before the Englishmen, that is certain," Murphy said, as he ordered the volante driver to "heave to," while he inspected the premises.

The spot selected for the meeting was known as the "Cavalier's Crossing," from the fact that two Spaniards had fought a duel on the ground with small swords, more than fifty years before. Ever since that period it had been used for hostile meetings, and many a bloody duel had taken place there.

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"Ah, what a sweet spot!" murmured Murphy. "Search the whole island, and a better place could not be found for our business."

"I hear a carriage on the road," I said, not wishing to dilate on a place that might witness my fall.

"Then it must be the party we are expecting. They are five minutes beyond the time, but we will overlook it for the sake of the fight."

Murphy's prediction was correct; for the volante, drawn by two horses, stopped, and four men, dressed in black, alighted.

"One of 'em is a surgeon — I told 'em to bring him in case of accidents," Murphy said, in reply to my look of interrogation.

The Englishmen walked towards us until within ten paces, when they stopped, and saluted us by raising their caps. Murphy and Horton advanced and shook hands. The doctor took snuff, and eyed us suspiciously, as though settling in his own mind our exact standing. I thought that I had seen his face before, but was not positive.

"We are a few minutes late," the lieutenant said, when he and Murphy met, "but I trust that you will excuse it."

"We should have been much more sorry if you had not come, I assure you," replied Murphy.

"We took the liberty of bringing the surgeon of our ship," the lieutenant said, at length. "An accident may happen, you know."

"It is quite probable," Murphy continued.

"You have brought the weapons, I trust?" the Englishman inquired.

"I'd as soon forget my chain and anchor if going to sea. Step this way, and you shall see them. There they are," said Murphy, "two as good rifles as can be found in Cuba. Take your choice. We have none. One is as good as the other."

"I shall make choice of this," Horton said, at length.

I felt rejoiced. He had chosen Murphy's, and not the one I was accustomed to use.

The seconds proceeded to load the weapons most carefully; each grain of powder being weighed, for fear of not getting enough, or too little. The rifles were prepared and capped, and the seconds proceeded to measure off the distance with commendable promptness.

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"You will now take your stations, gentlemen," cried Mr. Horton; and, in obedience to that command, we moved to our respective posts, where the rifles were handed to us.

"The word will be given by me," Murphy said. "I shall repeat 'one, two, three — fire.' Neither of you will fire until you hear the 'three.' This must be recollected, or unpleasant feelings may arise. Don't forget."

"I wish to speak to that gentleman one moment," cried the surgeon, pointing to me.

"It is too late," said Murphy.

"But it may save the effusion of blood. Mr. Russell is not bound to meet a person who is not a —"

"I tell you that the time for talking has gone by, and we don't lay to any longer for any one. Fill the topsails, and drive ahead," Murphy exclaimed.

I could not think what the doctor wanted, and would have given him an opportunity to speak, if Murphy had not been so positive in refusing. The surgeon consoled himself with a pinch of snuff, and looked at me harder than ever.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" cried Murphy.

"I am ready," I answered.

"And I," Russell said; but his voice was almost inaudible.

"Then keep your weather eyes open for the word. Now then — one!"

I brought my rifle to my shoulder, and cocked it. Russell had done the same before the word.

"Two!" thundered Murphy, in a voice that could have been heard fore and aft in a gale of wind.

"Three — fire!" he continued.

I heard the discharge of Russell's rifle before I fired. The ball whizzed within a foot of my head, but I was safe. I took a deliberate aim, and also fired almost as soon as Murphy had uttered the last word. I did not aim to kill or to wound. I aimed to frighten my adversary, and think that I did, for the ball passed between his right arm and body, so near that his clothing was cut as though with a knife.

"I'm wounded," he shouted; and down went his rifle to the ground as though mortally hurt.

His seconds and friends rushed towards him, and Francisco and Murphy came towards me with eager looks.

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"Are you all right?" demanded Murphy.

"I'm not touched," I replied, with a smile

"Thank fortune for that. But I think the Englishman has got a belly-full that will last him for a month. See; they are examining his wound."

"They won't find one," I replied, confidently.

"Why not?"

"Because I aimed to frighten, and not to kill."

"The devil you did. And now the fellow will ask for another shot at you. What did you want to play for?"

He did not stop to hear my explanations, but waddled towards the other party, who surrounded Russell.

"He isn't damaged much—is he?" asked Murphy, with a slight laugh.

"No, I think not," replied Horton, with a look that approached contempt. "He is good for another shot."

"No, I am not," faintly gasped Russell. "I'm satisfied with what I have got."

"Hold your tongue, sir!" thundered Horton, indignantly. "You will be guided by your seconds in this matter, and do as they tell you."

"But I won't fire another shot," persisted Russell, doggedly.

"Will you keep quiet?" roared Horton.

"My friend is not yet satisfied, sir," Murphy said, speaking to Horton.

The lieutenant hardly knew how to proceed. He looked at the surgeon for advice, and that gentleman was not slow in offering it. He drew the officer one side, and whispered to him for a few moments earnestly. The lieutenant looked surprised, and scrutinized the faces of Murphy and myself attentively. I wondered what was in the wind, and was soon enlightened.

"This affair can proceed no farther," Mr. Horton said, firmly but quietly.

"And why not, in the devil's name?" roared Murphy.

"Because, sir, my friend is a gentleman."

"And do you pretend to say that my friend is not one also?" cried Murphy, his face swelling with passion.

"I am not required to give an answer to that question. But this you must be satisfied with. Your friend has had a shot, and here the matter ends."

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"Ends?" gasped Murphy.

"Ends," repeated the lieutenant, quite calmly.

"I — I don't understand this," the captain said, gulping down his mighty wrath with the aid of a chew of tobacco.

"Perhaps it is as well that you don't. With the shot that has been exchanged, Mr. Russell feels satisfied, but will not risk the loss of his reputation by firing another."

"Why, the lad seemed to stand up well enough, all but his knees, and them was rather shaky," the captain said.

"You don't understand me, sir," replied the lieutenant. "I don't mean to impugn the courage of my friend."

"Then what did you mean? Hang me if I ain't taken all aback by this 'ere course of proceedings," roared Murphy.

"You know, sir, that my principal is a gentleman," he said, "and it is derogatory to his dignity to fight with a slaver, or a man engaged in the trade."

The thing was out at last; but it was a long time before the lieutenant had been brought to the scratch, and revealed that which was on his mind. As soon as he mentioned the word "slaver," I knew at once where I had seen the doctor's face. He was on board the Serpent when she was lying at Gabun, watching our movements. He had been transferred to the Scorpion, and, what was worse, recollected my face, having seen me one day when he visited the Coquette for the purpose of prescribing for a sick man, down with the coast fever.

For a few seconds Murphy was speechless with astonishment; but he rallied after a while, and was vehement in his denunciation of the man who would creep out of a fight on such a supposition.

"We can't discuss the question," said Mr. Horton. "My man must remain satisfied without an additional exchange of shots."

"Then all that I can say is, that he is easily suited; and I wish you a good day, unless you would like to take a crack at me, just for friendship's sake."

The lieutenant declined; but as he led his friend from the field, I could see an expression that was jubilant upon Russell's face at the prospect of escaping so cheaply.

"It was a shrewd operation on that fellow's part," muttered Murphy, with a grin of approval. "The cuss hadn't got nerve enough to stand another shot, so they resorted to the slave dodge

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to prevent us from having a second clip at him. But there's no use in growling like a sick marine. The thing is over, and we may as well go back to the city and get breakfast. I'm hungry."

We rode slowly back to Havana, all hands feeling in good humor. I, especially, was happy, and contented with myself. I was satisfied that I had not killed the Englishman as I might have done, and was more particularly pleased that I was unharmed, and likely to make Isadora happy with the successful termination of the duel. Under this state of things we reached Havana by nine o'clock in the forenoon, and when the volante drove up to the door I saw Isadora gazing from the window with anxious eyes, and the look of concern did not pass from her face until she saw that I was well and unharmed.

I settled my bill with the tobacconist the next morning, and received a present of a few hundred choice cigars for my liberality in paying him all that he asked. Then I took leave of Francisco; and as a recompense for his kindness, slipped upon his finger a handsome ring, which he protested he would wear to the last day of his life. He accompanied us on board, where I found Murphy had kept his word, and made ample preparations for us. He had been fitting up a state-room in excellent style, and it looked as neat as a chamber at a first-class hotel.

Towards twelve o'clock a light land breeze sprang up, and we made preparations for weighing anchor, and our movements immediately excited the attention of the officers of the frigate Scorpion, which vessel was lying about a cable's length from the Coquette, on the east side of the bay.

"The fellow is going to follow us out, I believe," Murphy said, after watching the movements of the Scorpion for a few minutes in silence, undecided whether to give the orders to trip the anchor, or remain in the harbor until dark, when we could steal out unnoticed.

"He's a fast 'un," cried one of our men, who was coiling down a rope on the quarter-deck, and overheard the remark.

"You know her, then?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "and I have good cause to remember her. I was two years a foretop-man on board of the ship, and got four dozen during that time, with the bos'n's lady."

"I suppose you deserved it," said Murphy.

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"Well, I don't know but I did, sir; but it's cussed hard to be flogged for splicing the main brace, when an officer gets just as drunk, and escapes."

The Englishman had let fall his sails, and we could hear his men as they stamped around the capstan, and hove in the chain. The getting under weigh of a man-of-war always attracts much attention in Havana, as by it people judge of the discipline of the crew, and commend or condemn, according to the smartness that is exhibited. On this account we also came in for much attention, for the perfect symmetry of the Coquette, and her jet black hull, with a narrow streak of red, having been repainted while lying in Havana, combined to render her the best looking craft in the harbor.

A light breeze rippled over the water, just as we broke ground, and the schooner gracefully payed off by the aid of her jib, and stood towards the Scorpion, intending to pass under her stern, as there was plenty of room to do, while ahead was a Spanish ship, loading with sugar, and her decks covered with people, who seemed to be celebrating a feast day, or having a feast, for there was music and singing on board, and many ladies to be seen upon the quarter-deck. As the Coquette gathered headway, we saw at once that the Englishman's anchor had broken ground, and that the ship had sternway on, the wind being too light to enable the frigate to work readily. Murphy saw the position of the vessel at once, and that he would lose ground if he passed under her stern, so he luffed up a little, flattened down the sails, and determined to pass across his bow, just astern of the Spanish ship, there being sufficient room to do so by close attention to the helm. Suddenly, an officer in uniform, armed with a speaking trumpet, sprang upon the hammock-nettings of the frigate, and hailed us.

"Schooner, ahoy!" he shouted, "don't attempt to pass across our bow. Put your helm up, ease off your main sheet, and pass under our stern."

"They are hailing us," I said to Murphy.

"Let them hail and be hanged!" was his quick reply.

"Do you hear on board of the schooner?" demanded the officer, fiercely.

"No entende!" roared Murphy, with a slight Irish brogue, which made the ladies on board of the Spanish ship clap their hands with merriment.

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We were not more than a cable's length from the man-of-war, and were moving through the water little faster than a knot an hour.

"Send a man here who can speak Spanish," cried the English captain, sharply; and almost before the words were out of his mouth, an officer mounted the hammock nettings by the commander's side, and repeated the words of his superior in Spanish.

"What in the devil's name do you mean by talking to me in such a manner?" asked Murphy. "I don't speak the lingo."

"Blast you, I'll make you walk Spanish if you cross my bow!" roared the now thoroughly aroused captain.

"Have you got a lieutenant named Horton on board?" asked Murphy, quite calmly.

"Yes," replied the captain, astonished at the question.

"And a Mr. Russell?"

"Yes."

"Well, give my respects to both of them — will you?" Murphy cried, with a wave of his hand.

The captain of the Scorpion sprang from the hammock nettings as though he was stung by one of the insects of that name. We did not hear him swear, but I have no doubt that he did utter an English oath that was full of significance, for his ship had just gathered headway, and was under steerage way, when down went the helm, and she luffed up slowly as though about to tack ship, or come to anchor. At any rate, either purpose was dangerous to us, for we were likely to be jammed in between the frigate and the Spanish merchantman, and if such a thing happened, we should lose our spars close to the deck, or perhaps get our hull stove, and sink in the harbor. At first we could not believe that the Englishman really intended to tack ship or to anchor. We supposed that he was endeavoring to avoid a vessel off his larboard bow, and under this impression we kept on our way, each moment expecting the Scorpion to keep on his course again, and it was not until we were within ten fathoms of the frigate's bow that we understood the manœuvre, but then it seemed too late to guard against the collision that we saw the Englishman was bound to cause if possible.

The people on board of the Spanish ship saw the danger we were in, and sought to warn us by gestures and loud cries, which attracted the attention of all in the harbor who were not regarding the scene. They saw at once that the Scorpion was

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about to take a summary method of preventing our sailing, and that the manner of doing so was peculiarly English, and of course an outrage.

If we had had American colors flying, the commander of the Scorpion would have thought twice before he put into execution his project; but as we were under the Spanish flag, and Spain is but a fourth-rate power, the Englishman knew that no questions would be asked, or if they were asked, that they would be easily answered.

But the Coquette was not so easily crushed as the Englishman seemed to think, and just when it seemed to the spectators that we should drift under his bow, we put our helm hard down, eased off our jib sheets, shivered our foretop-sail, and hauled aft our main sheet. The schooner instantly obeyed her helm, and poked her nose into the wind, shooting ahead slowly at the same time, clearing the taffrail of the Spanish ship by just about half a fathom, while at the same time the heavy jib-boom of the Scorpion was over our deck, where we expected it to foul every moment; but luck was on our side, for, owing to the light breeze, the Coquette moved two feet to the Scorpion's one, and as we gradually forged ahead, grazed the Spaniard, and then paid off the head of the schooner by the aid of the jib and foretop-sail, until our other sails were filled, when we drew ahead until the bow of the Scorpion was entirely clear, and we had room to work.

Then from every vessel in the harbor arose such wild cheers of exultation as only sailors can bestow, and at a sign from Murphy our men sprang upon the bulwark and joined in the general roar of triumph, which must have mortified the Englishman most intensely, for we could see him on his quarter-deck shake his speaking trumpet at us, as though determined to get even the first opportunity.

Another triumph was to come, for the Scorpion forged ahead so far, that her flying jib-boom came in contact with the Spaniard's mizzen-mast, and carrying away the former's spar, snapping it like a pipe-stem, and falling under foot in one confused mass. Then another mighty shout arose, which we gladly responded to, and for the purpose of repairing damages the Englishman dropped anchor, and let his topsails down upon the caps.

We tacked ship, and once more stood towards the Englishman; but this time we gave him a wide berth, and passed under his

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stern. Men were at work repairing the damage done to his jib-boom, and they displayed such activity that we could not doubt that the frigate would sail as soon as new spars, in the place of those broken, were replaced. The officers were on the quarter-deck, and as we slowly forged ahead we could easily make out Horton and the surgeon, but they made no sign that they recognized us, and we were as backward in that respect as they were. As we drew near Moro Castle the breeze freshened, so we eased off the sheets, and kept the schooner free; and by the time we were outside of the harbor, we were walking through the water at the rate of six knots per hour, and a fair prospect of getting more wind from off the land as the sun went down. For the first hour we shaped our course to the northward, for the purpose of getting an offing, and deceiving the captain of the Scorpion into the belief that we were not intending to touch on the coast, but steer direct for some port in the United States for supplies. As soon, however, as we were out of sight of land, we put our helm up and ran down for Quitero, where our provisions and water were waiting, and where our slave deck and guns were stored. As soon as we got before the wind the schooner's motion increased, and it was sufficient to cause Isadora to experience sensations such as she had never before known.

"Come down here and take care of your sister," Murphy said, just after dinner, while we were running down the coast. "She is groaning like an eighty-gun ship in a gale, and I am afraid will carry away some of her rigging unless preventers are rove. Come and cheer her with the light of your eyes."

I found Isadora was quite sick, and like most of her nation, under great apprehensions when a little ill. She had a pretty fair attack of sea-sickness, and for a few minutes refused to be comforted.

"Give me something," she cried, "to allay this dreadful feeling. I feel as though I was dying. Kiss me, and bless me before I go."

I attempted to kiss her; but before I could reach her lips I was compelled to draw back, although I was obliged to laugh heartily at my escape.

"You no longer love me," she mourned. "You are tired of me."

"Not quite, dear. As soon as this fit of sea-sickness passes off you will be more beautiful than ever, for it will make your skin as transparent as a lily."

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That consoled her. Only tell a woman she can improve her complexion, and she will willingly endure pain and suffering. From this time Isadora did not complain; but, fortunately, her sickness was of short duration, and before she had been upon the water a week her sea legs were on, and she professed to be quite a sailor.

The next day, at sunrise, we anchored at the little sheltered port of Quitero, and commenced receiving from the agent's hands provisions and water. As cruisers were known to be in the neighborhood we used much despatch, for fear they should poke their nose into port and take us, without stopping to investigate whether right or wrong. On the second day we had our guns and ammunition on board, and the slave deck stowed away in its place under hatches. We should have got under weigh at sundown had we not had to wait for orders as to whether we should visit Gabun or Madagascar. Letters were expected by express from Havana, containing the latest information as to the disposition of the English cruisers, and, until we received them, our hands were tied. Murphy fretted, but his fretting was of no use, and the sun went down with a slight breeze blowing into the harbor, and the promise of a dark night. We had supper late, for we had been at work hard all day, and while we were making sad havoc among the steward's delicacies we heard a boat run alongside, and the next instant our agent stepped on deck.

"Hallo! what brings you on board?" Murphy asked, surprised at his appearance.

"*Diablo*, I have news of importance to communicate, or you would not see me here. You must get under weigh and be off in a hurry, or you will be under the lee of an English frigate before morning."

"How is that? Explain!" cried Murphy, somewhat astonished.

"The Scorpion left Havana yesterday afternoon, and this evening, at sundown, was observed standing towards the harbor, under shortened sail. She is determined to cut you out, I'll bet an ounce. You must trust to your heels, and be off at once."

"And certainly fall into the Englishman's hands. No, that wouldn't do. I'll warrant you that if he has followed us here, he would not let a boat leave the harbor without being overhauled. If we stay here we shall have to discharge everything during the night, and let him find the schooner empty in the morning, for the Scorpion is determined to take us, right or wrong."

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The captain mused long and earnestly after he spoke.

"What time is it high water?" he asked, at length.

"Not until one o'clock," replied the agent.

"If we could keep them off until that hour, we could make our escape by way of the creek," Murphy said, after consulting a small map of the harbor.

"Perhaps the Englishman knows that route as well as yourselves," remarked the agent.

"I think not — in fact I am positive that the creek is not on any map in existence excepting the one I hold in my hand. This I bought of the oldest pilot on the coast, and he buoyed out the channel. We can go through, I am confident, for I have done the same thing once before, and know every inch of water and ground. We only draw seven feet, and at high tides there's seven and a half in the shoalest places."

"But they may attempt to cut you out during the night," the agent said. "Three or four boats would trouble you if well armed."

"They may," the captain said, thoughtfully, "but I don't think they will. The night is dark, however, and Englishmen are plucky. It is best to use all due precautions and prevent a surprise. Go on shore, and send me thirty bold fellows who are willing to risk their lives for an ounce each. I shall up anchor and warp the schooner close to the creek, where I shall moor her by kedges, and show the Englishmen the Coquette's broadside in case they want a little brush."

We surprised the crew by ordering the anchor up, and still more by compelling them to maintain a perfect silence while rousing in the chain. They knew that their duty was to obey, and they did not grumble or ask a question. We sent our boat ahead with six stout fellows, and by the aid of the schooner's sweeps, soon placed the Coquette at the mouth of the creek, which was used entirely by fishermen for shelter. Here we moored the Coquette, and then made preparations for our defence.

To make all sure, however, that the Scorpion was off the harbor, Murphy hired a fisherman, whom he could depend upon, to take his canoe and paddle out on a reconnoitering expedition, and bring back all the information he could obtain; and while he was absent we continued our work in earnest. We loaded our guns with grape and canister, armed our men with cutlasses and pis-

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tols, and then triced up our boarding nets, fore and aft, to prevent the enemy from carrying our decks with a rush.

While we were preparing for the expected conflict, two boat loads of Creoles came on board, each man armed with a long, dangerous-looking knife, which they were accustomed to use in their mêlées on shore. There were thirty of them, and they promised to risk their lives for an ounce per man, and to stick by the vessel as long as they considered it safe so to do; which meant that they would jump overboard and swim to the shore as soon as they found that the tide of battle was turning against us. To guard against this, however, we distributed the Spaniards in different sections of the schooner, where they would have to fight under the eyes of the crew, and, in case of dissatisfaction, would not be so likely to hear of it.

By the time our preparations were completed it was ten o'clock. All the lights were extinguished fore and aft, and it was difficult to see a canoe a few fathoms distant from the vessel. Look-outs were stationed, with orders to report if boats approached, and the rest of the crew were compelled to be upon deck, at their stations, and get what sleep they could.

"A canoe is off the starboard quarter, sir," cried one of our lookouts, in a low tone.

"Let it come alongside," replied Murphy. "It is the fisherman I expect."

The canoe shot up alongside, and the man whom the captain had hired to reconnoitre the position of the frigate came on deck.

"Well," cried Murphy, "what have you discovered?"

"The frigate is anchored at the mouth of the harbor, senor, and no vessel can pass out without being seen."

"Are they moving on board? Do they look as though intending mischief?" was the next question.

"I paddled close to the ship, and was hailed. I replied that I was a fisherman, and I had my lines with me in case they should disbelieve the assertion. I was ordered on board, and I did not dare refuse, for I was close to the sentry's musket. They asked me if the schooner was at anchor in the harbor, and I said that I did not know, for I had been out all day, and was just returning home. They believed me, senor, for they said that to-morrow forenoon they should enter the harbor and capture the schooner; for she was a slaver, and a bold one at that."

"What do you think of the news?" asked Murphy.

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"I think they were fearful that the fisherman would give us information, and they wish to deceive us by pretending that the attack will be delayed until morning," I replied.

"Just my idea to a hair; but we ain't so green as that," Murphy remarked; and then he continued to interrogate the fisherman.

"Did you see any movements on board, as though boats were to be sent off during the night?"

"No, senor. The boats were hanging at the davits, and the men handling cutlasses and pistols."

"Just as I thought; they mean to give us a call during the night, and they will commence the attack soon after twelve. If we can beat them off, we can make our escape, and be clear of the land by morning."

"The senorita Isadora wishes to see you, senor," cried the steward, just at that moment.

"Go and comfort her," Murphy said. "I will take care of the deck until you return. And you needn't hurry, you know, for there is no danger just at present."

The lady was nervous, but soon went to sleep, and I returned to the deck.

"All quiet so far," said Murphy, who was pacing the quarter-deck, smoking a cigar. "It is eight bells, and time that operations were commenced if they intend to do anything. By one o'clock it will be high water, and we shan't wait for the Englishman to find us."

We talked for a few moments on the subject, but suddenly I heard the sound of muffled oars, as I thought, upon the water, but it was so dark that we could see nothing. We listened attentively.

"They are coming around the point," Murphy said, pointing with his finger to the entrance of the harbor, which was about half a mile distant from where we were anchored.

"That is the regular man-of-war stroke," I remarked. "They may attempt to disguise it, and pull as noiselessly as Congo men; but one who has ever heard men-of-war's-men pull, will recognize it at once."

"Yes; and I can even tell the number of boats that's coming," Murphy remarked. "There's three boats, or I'm a sinner."

I knew that he was a sinner; but did not think it was necessary to say so, for I did not have a very good opinion of myself.

"Call up the men quietly, and see that they take their stations

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without noise. If the boats should not find us, I don't think it is necessary to mourn much, for who knows which of us will fall in the fight?"

I went forward; but, to my surprise, found our men were on the alert, and wide awake, but the Cubans were snoring most unmercifully. They were readily aroused, however, and stationed at their posts for the purpose of cutting down the enemy if he attempted to board; the handling of the large guns being left to the crew of the Coquette, on account of their knowledge of gunnery, and because we trusted more to them than to cutlasses and pistols.

After returning to the quarter-deck, I found that the boats had pulled to the place where we were anchored at sundown; but not finding us there, it was evident that those in command were laying on their oars, and deliberating upon what course to pursue. They knew that we had not escaped, because it was evident, from the fisherman's account, that nothing could pass in or out of the harbor without being overhauled.

After deliberation, which lasted for five minutes, we could hear the boats pull slowly towards the shore, under the impression that we had kedged in for safety. We guessed that they almost touched the beach, for in a few minutes the sound of oars again ceased, and another deliberation was entered upon. This time the conference was brief, and after it was over we found that the boats were headed in our direction.

"We have got to fight," Murphy said, drawing a long breath. "In half a minute's time they will see us."

"Give them an opportunity to think twice before they attack us," I pleaded, anxious to save shedding blood.

"It is hardly fair to talk of such matters with an enemy within gunshot," Murphy answered; but I had no doubt he would comply with my request, and I had hardly time to listen to his reply, when the sound of oars became very distinct, and we could see the boats approaching by the phosphorescent light which the blades made in the water.

"Give way, boys," we heard an officer say, who commanded one of the boats. "Pull strong and silently, and we shall take them napping."

"Boats ahoy!" roared Murphy,

There was no response.

"Boats ahoy!" repeated Murphy, still louder.

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There was no reply.

"If the boats come any nearer, I shall fire upon them," Murphy cried.

"Give way, men," shouted the officer who had charge of the cutting-out expedition, and the men cheered, and bent to their oars.

In another minute they would have been alongside, and ready to fight with all the obstinacy of Englishmen.

"Fire!" shouted Murphy.

I sprang to the midship gun, and jerked the lanyard, but there was no response.

"Fire, for God's sake, fire!" roared Murphy.

"The priming of the guns has been removed, sir," I replied, for I saw that the men who had charge of the light six-pounders were are as much embarrassed as myself.

I ran to the place where the percussions were usually kept, but they had been removed.

"There is a traitor on board," I said, in a low tone.

"It is no time to ask who he is," cried Murphy. "We will deal with him after we have beaten off the enemy. Use your pistols, lads. Take good aim and fire."

Our crew responded with a cheer, and an irregular volley was discharged at the boats, which must have done considerable execution, for we heard shrill yells and cries of pain; but the boats still came on.

I saw an officer standing up in the stern-sheets of the foremost boat, and he was urging the men on with gestures and words. I snatched my rifle from the place where I had put it a few minutes before, and took a hasty aim, and fired. I saw the leader fall headlong upon the man who was pulling the after oar, and his death was responded to by a yell of rage and a sharp volley of musketry, which knocked over two of our assistants, the Creoles, and wounded one of our own men.

"Give them another taste of gunpowder, boys," shouted Murphy, discharging his rifle; and then using his revolver with deadly effect upon the boats' crews, which were within a few fathoms of the schooner.

Our men discharged their pistols, and then, drawing their cutlasses, awaited the onset. The enemy's boats ran alongside of us, and, dropping their oars, attempted to spring upon deck; but,

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to their surprise, they found that the boarding net offered a serious objection, and while many clung to the net and hacked at it with their cutlasses, others fell back into the boats, and awaited further orders.

"Up and at them, boys!" shouted the English officer. "Drive the pirates into the sea — exterminate them."

The men responded with a cheer, and once more attempted to reach us; but the Creoles and our crew pricked them and stabbed at them with their knives, so that they were beaten back in confusion, and sought safety by once more jumping into their boats.

"Hurrah, boys, we have them now!" shouted Murphy. "Sink their boats. Send the cold shot amongst them."

Our men took the hint, and hurled thirty pound shot into the boats, and some of the missiles crashed through the planks, and knocked down half a dozen of the enemy.

"Our boat is sinking," cried some of the men-of-war's-men, in dismay.

"Shove off, then. Be lively, men. Out with your oars, and give way. Our lives depend upon it," cried the only officer who was not killed or wounded.

Our men, from motives of humanity, or because they did not wish to strike a brave and defenceless foe, suspended their operations, and allowed the boats to leave the schooner's side without further molestation.

"Down upon the decks, all of you," cried the captain, as soon as the boats had got half a cable's length from us. "Down flat, and lay there till I tell you to get up."

The men obeyed, and it was lucky that they did so; for the next instant a small boat-gun, filled with bullets and canister, was discharged, and the shot whistled around our deck and tore through our bulwarks, scattering splinters in every direction.

There was a sharp cry of pain, and one of our Creoles, who had neglected the warning, fell upon the deck mortally wounded, both of his legs broken, and with a hole in his body large enough to put a man's fist. The boats did not wait for a reply to their parting salutation, but rowed off as fast as possible, three or four men in each boat baling with their hats to keep the cutters afloat.

"Now, then, down with our quarter boats and get a line out ahead," cried the captain. "It is high tide, and we have not a

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moment to lose. The enemy will return, and with all the force that he can muster, determined to conquer or die."

We dropped our boats into the water with a rush, weighed our forward kedge, so the bow of the schooner paid off by the aid of the wind, light as it was, and when she headed for the creek, one boat commenced towing, and the other weighed the second kedge, which we had astern, brought it alongside, and then joined on to assist towing. In a few minutes we entered the mouth of the creek, which was not more than six fathoms wide, with low, marshy shores. The creek was very crooked, and nearly a mile in length. Once or twice we just touched bottom; but it was soft, slimy mud, and we were enabled to slip over it without losing much headway.

"Suppose we find the Scorpion waiting for us?" I asked of Murphy, just before we made the mouth of the outlet.

"Then we must take to the land, and escape the best way we can."

"And lose the vessel?"

"Yes, or else lose our lives. We can build another Coquette, but we can't put breath into our bodies after it is knocked out by a grape shot. Steady as she goes."

"Steady, sir," responded the man at the wheel; and on we went, doubling a short elbow, and then before us was the ocean; but the night was too dark to enable us to tell whether the frigate was within gunshot of us, or was still lying at anchor off the harbor.

We dropped a kedge under foot, and called the boats alongside for the purpose of landing our extra men upon the beach, from whence they could easily reach the town before morning. While the men were getting into the boat, I heard a slight scuffle, and went to the gangway to see what the matter was.

"Here's Thompson, sir, says he will go in the boats," one of the men said.

Thompson was a new hand. We had shipped him at Havana, and he professed to be willing to do anything for the sake of sailing with us. He said that he had run away from a British frigate which was on the station, and he feared that if he was retaken, he would be flogged without mercy. Murphy did not like the man's looks, but he had taken him from motives of humanity. When I saw what was the cause of the disturbance, I

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called Thompson out of the boat; but he grumbled a little, and I determined to recollect it when we got upon blue water; for the discipline of a slaver does not permit of grumbling from any one, no matter how hard the work may be, or how much suffering is endured.

The boats were compelled to make two trips, being loaded down each time; and, just as they were ready to shove off the second time, one of our old hands sung out,—

"Here's Thompson in the boat again, sir."

I made him come on board; but he did so in rather a sulky manner, and grumbled out a wish that he could leave, as he was tired of our craft already. I kept my eyes on him until the boats shoved off, and then I sought the captain.

"We have a traitor on board," I said.

"I wish I knew who he is," the captain said.

"I can tell who I think he is," I replied.

"Who?"

"Thompson."

"Curse him; I thought so myself. He shall swing for it, if convicted, as sure as my name is Murphy."

It was a common thing, twenty years ago, for men-of-war to leave one of their crew, a truly reliable man, in ports frequented by slavers; and if the fellow managed to ship on board one of the prohibited craft, he would work with a will, and seem intensely interested in the success of the voyage; but his eyes and ears were opened to all the secrets of the business, and when they were learned, he would suddenly disappear at the first port, rejoin his ship, and communicate all the information he had acquired to his captain. The latter would thus have an immense advantage, knowing as he did the rendezvous of the most noted slavers, and the names of the craft engaged in the trade, and who acted as agents for them. In case a slaver was captured by a man-of-war while a spy was on board, the latter generally had a small piece of paper, signed by his captain, which stated who the bearer was, and why he was on board. This paper was always concealed, so that no one could discover its whereabouts.

Our boats returned, and were hoisted up in silence, for fear that any noise should alarm the enemy, who was not more than a mile and a half distant, even if he was not cruising for us close at hand. As soon as our boats were up, we made sail, and ran

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out from under the high land, and then swept the ocean for the Scorpion; but nothing was in sight, and we were free once more. We then piled on the canvas in earnest, set the watches, and shaped our course for Gabun.

The decks were cleared up, the boats secured, and the starboard watch went below, to sleep until eight bells. I had seen Isadora but a few minutes since the fight; and then I had just time to kiss her and assure her of my safety, when I was compelled to return to the deck. I was so anxious for a few minutes' conversation, that I begged Murphy to keep my watch for a short time, while I went below to get a cigar; but the "old man" knew I was only making an excuse to see Isadora, and he growled his consent.

I found Isadora anxiously awaiting me, but she could not understand the reason why I was not able to stop with and console her until morning; and, after I had explained all the workings of the watch system, she declared that, as soon as she had wholly recovered from her seasickness, she would keep me company every night, rain or shine; but I afterwards found that she much preferred being under shelter on squally nights, when the rain fell in torrents.

"I am so glad you have come to see me!" she said; and from the warmth of her welcome I had no doubt of it.

"You are not yet tired of a sailor's life?" I asked.

"Not as long as I have you with me," she replied. "I can't say that I should feel contented unless you were here; for how dull it must be on the water, where you see the same faces every day, and the monotony is not relieved by a single visit from a friend!"

"But are you sure that you have none of those feelings?" I asked.

"I tell you, frankly, that I am content as long as you are with me; but, after all, how much better it would be, and how much happier we should feel, if we were on shore, where no gales or men-of-war could terrify us! Then we could always be with each other, and feel much more content than at the present time."

"And we will yet live so," I said, most fervently. "Let me make this voyage, and if it is a successful one, I shall save enough to support us without much labor. We will hire a small piece of land in Cuba, and there spend the rest of our days."

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"Will you do so?" she asked; and round my neck went her well-formed arms, and upon my bosom she placed her head, and shed tears of delight.

"I promise you most faithfully that such shall be the case. You shall then be my wife, if such is your wish, and I will be as kind to you as I am now."

"And love me as much?" she whispered in my ear.

I kissed her in response, and she was very well satisfied.

"I will pray the saints to give us prosperous winds, and a quick return to Havana," she said; and even while I held her in my arms, she muttered a prayer that I hoped would be heard.

The more I knew of Isadora, the more I liked her. She was worthy of a better fate than being linked to a slaver, and I knew it; but I could not bear the idea of relinquishing her, and endeavoring to make her lead a pure life. I now think, when I look back upon the past, that I could have done so; for her affection for me was unbounded, and she would have followed my instructions or requests, had I been serious in making them. But fate controlled us, and fate barred all attempts to bring the girl to a higher life. I saved her from a lingering imprisonment, and perhaps death at the hands of a public executioner, by my selfish passion; but she never regretted it, I believe, and never ceased to love me.

I left Isadora happy and confident, and went on deck, where I found Murphy smoking a cigar, and walking back and forth in deep thought.

"The traitor we have in our midst came very near accomplishing his object to-night," he said.

"I was thinking of the same thing, and wondering how we could prove his guilt," I replied.

"We will bring it out, and then —"

Murphy did not finish the sentence, but he pointed to our fore-yard-arm most significantly.

"I saw nothing of Thompson during the attack," I continued.

"Neither did I," the captain said; then turning to the man at the wheel, he asked, "Did you see anything of Thompson to-night when the boats were attacking us?"

"Thompson, sir?" replied the man. "Now I come to think of it, sir, I don't think that I did."

"Did you see him near the guns before the attack?" the captain asked.

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"Let me see, sir. Now I think of it, I did see him squinting over the midship guns as though he was levelling it."

"What time was that?" I asked.

"What time, sir? Let me see. It was while the boats were in shore, sir, and before the attack."

"And did you see him at the other guns?" Murphy asked.

"At the other guns, sir?" repeated the man, who was a Briton, and had once acted in the capacity of waiter at a cook-shop in the lowest part of Liverpool. "Yes, sir; I think that I did see him leaning on the six-pounders, and slapping them familiarly, as though he was chock full of fight."

"That is good evidence," Murphy said, as we left the vicinity of the wheel, and talked apart. "I did not like the appearance of the man when he offered to ship, but he seemed so eager, and was not particular regarding wages, so I took him. If he is proved traitor he shall swing."

The next morning, at two bells, or nine o'clock, as soon as the men had eaten their breakfast and smoked their pipes, they were, greatly to their surprise, mustered aft, and ranged in front of the quarter-deck, where Murphy was installed in state, armed with a pair of revolvers, and a cutlass at his side.

"My lads," said the captain, suddenly, "have I not always treated you like men?"

"Yes, sir," cried the crew, with one accord, with the exception of Thompson, who had edged away from the men until he stood outside of the circle.

"Then which of you dare to turn traitor, and endeavor to give the schooner up to its enemies?" thundered Murphy, with eyes that flashed like coals of fire.

Not a man spoke, but they looked their astonishment. Thompson, on whom I had kept my eyes, turned deadly pale, and cast his eyes around the horizon, as though the sight of even the frigate which he ran away from would be a welcome relief.

"What! cannot a man among you answer the question?" thundered Murphy, casting his eyes upon the face of every man before him, as though he read his thoughts.

"I can speak for meself, cap'n," one old tar said, taking a huge chew of tobacco, and rolling it about his mouth with infinite relish. "I don't know what the others may say, but I can speak for meself, and I'm blowed if it be me."

"Nor me!" "Nor me!" cried the crew.

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"You know what you shipped for — don't you?" Murphy asked.

"Yes, sir — to carry niggers to Havana," responded the crew.

I narrowly escaped a smile at the reply, which was eminently a practical one, and not exactly what the captain meant.

"And what else did you ship for?" thundered the master, more fierce than ever.

"To obey orders if we broke owners," replied the old sailor, nodding to his companions with the assurance that he was right.

"Yes, you shipped to obey orders," the captain continued, "and you also shipped with the understanding that if you proved treacherous or mutinous, death was to be your portion, after a fair hearing. Do you recollect that?" the captain asked.

"We recollect it, sir," the men replied, more thoughtful.

"Then there is no occasion for my reading the documents. But you know that there has been treachery on board, and that by it we were nearly captured last night. Now, on my account and your own, I demand of you the traitor and his punishment."

The men looked at each other, and some few whispered together.

"I tell you what it is, cap'n," said the old sailor; "you knows the boys that has sailed with you more than one vige, and you knows that they wouldn't do such a thing — don't you?"

"Until the traitor is found and punished, I shall look upon no one as innocent."

"Can't you tell us, cap'n, whom you 'spec?" the old sailor asked, as the men were leaving the quarter-deck.

"No; go and see if you can't hit upon the lubber, and if your opinions square with mine, I am satisfied. Go, and be careful."

The men went forward calmly, and in silence. The first thing they did was to light their pipes and muster around the windlass; for a while they spoke only in whispers. I kept my eyes on Thompson, and saw that he appeared to take an active part in the matter, and apparently was endeavoring to lead the crew upon the wrong track.

"I fear that fellow is a sea lawyer, and will induce the crew to believe that some one besides himself is the guilty party," I said to Murphy.

"Wait and see," he replied. A sailor's judgment is good, and although it may range wide of the mark sometimes, as a general

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thing it will settle down about right. They will figure it out, depend upon it."

At length I could see that they whispered among themselves, and looked with suspicion upon Thompson, who talked less, and seemed inclined to feel that his position was getting to be a precarious one. By and by the mutters grew louder, and we could hear, where we stood, on the quarter-deck, the remarks that were made.

"What did you want to go on shore for in the last boat?" demanded old Jack, who was elected spokesman, on account of his "gift of gab," as the men called it.

"'Cos I didn't want to sail in a vessel that has to fight her way over the big pond," replied the suspected man.

"Didn't you know that you would have to do a little of that when you put yer blasted name to the papers?" asked Jack.

"No, or I wouldn't have jined," replied Thompson, boldly.

"That's a cussed lie, 'cos the 'old man' don't trick any one. He tells 'em what they have got to 'spect, and they find out that what he says is true. Ain't that so, lads?" he continued, appealing to the others.

"That is true as a log-book," the men cried, with one accord.

"You see that the others all knew somethin' of the life we was to lead, and I don't believe the 'old man' would deceive any one but a nigger. Now, mate, you must confess all that you know 'bout this 'fair, and it won't go so hard with you."

"I don't know anything about the matter," replied Thompson, obstinately.

"Now, mate, don't go to flying into the face of an unmarciful Providence with that 'ere yarn, 'cos it won't go down with sailors, although marines might believe it. We know that you was fooling your time round those 'ere guns arter they was capped, and whar's the use of your denying it? Didn't you mean to give us to the man-of-war's boats?"

"Upon my word I didn't," responded Thompson, most earnestly.

"Then may the devil have mercy upon you as a most unnatural liar," cried Jack, with the utmost solemnity; and the crew cried, "Amen!" as though it was part of the ceremony.

"You see I was right in my surmises," Murphy said; but hardly had he finished speaking when the men made a sudden rush, threw Thompson upon the deck, and despite his struggles, bound his arms behind his back.

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"Aft with him!" shouted Jack. "Let the captain pronounce his fate. Death to traitors!"

"Death to traitors!" re-echoed the crew; and seizing Thompson, they brought him aft and threw him down near the break of the quarter-deck.

"Cap'n," said Jack, "we have studied over this 'ere thing, and we have got upon the right track at last. This man was seen skulking below when the boats attacked us, and he was seen to brush the caps from the guns. Do with him as you please."

"You have done well, men," Murphy replied. "I suspected the same person you have convicted, but it is not for me to pronounce his death. You can say how he shall die."

"A tail block and a rope's end," shouted the crew.

"For God's sake, don't murder me!" the prisoner cried. "Put me ashore upon an island, set me adrift in a boat; give me some chance for my life."

"Death to the traitor!" cried the crew; and one of the men, seizing a tail block, ran up the fore rigging and fastened it to the fore yard-arm. A second seized the end of a rope, and passed it up to the first, and it was rove through the block and led on deck. The doomed man was raised and carried forward; but at this stage of proceedings I went below, for I did not like to look upon the hanging of the poor wretch, guilty as I knew he was.

I heard the word given, and a run by those who held the rope; and when I went on deck half an hour afterwards, all was quiet, and the body of Thompson was miles astern, the ocean for a grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT. — A SHIP ON FIRE, AND WHAT WE SAVED FROM HER. — A RIVAL TO ISADORA, AND WHAT SHE THOUGHT OF IT.

On the evening of the third day from Cuba, Isadora and myself were leaning over the rail, talking of past scenes and future ones. The wind was light, and the ocean as calm as though asleep. The schooner was moving through the water not faster

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than three knots per hour, and not a sound was heard except the rippling of the water as the Coquette cut her way through it, the creaking of the masts and yards, or the song of a sailor who was trying to keep himself awake by singing such ballads as he had picked up during his cruise over the world. Murphy had retired to his cabin to drink a glass of grog and smoke a cigar before "turning in" for the night, and I was left upon the quarter-deck with Isadora, who, for the first time since we had been at sea, proposed to stand watch in my company; and very happy I was to find her willing to keep her eyes open for the sake of my society.

"We only need the moon to make the scene romantic," I said, in reply to some observation of the lady.

"Then we need want it no longer; for see, there she rises like a ball of fire from the ocean," Isadora said, pointing to the horizon, about two points off our weather bow.

I gazed in the direction indicated, and to my surprise saw a bright light upon the water, which did look some like the moon when it first rises from the bed of the ocean. But in this instance I knew it was in the wrong quarter of the horizon for the moon to rise, and secondly it was not time for the moon to show itself, at any rate.

"That is not the moon, Isadora," I said, looking through a spy-glass. "It is a vessel on fire."

"The saints preserve us — but perhaps there are people on board, and they need help," she said, earnestly.

"I have no doubt of it," I replied. "I will call Murphy, and see what he is disposed to do."

"Light off the starboard bow, sir," cried the lookout, who had been napping, and just waked up. The cry aroused the drowsy watch, and all hands were soon on deck looking with awe at the fire.

I stepped into the cabin, and found the captain just draining the last drop of grog from a tumbler.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"I can make out a bright light off the starboard bow, and it looks like a vessel on fire," I replied.

"And if we go near her we shall be crowded with passengers, and thus ruin our voyage," was the heartless response.

"I wasn't thinking of that," I said. "I was thinking what we could do to save the unfortunates."

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"Yes, it's just like you."

"And it would not surprise me to hear you order the course of the vessel changed, and do all you can to save the lives of the crew," I rejoined quietly, knowing that he was not near as hard-hearted as he appeared.

"And who's going to pay me for the loss of time and for the loss of provisions, I should like to know?" demanded Murphy, with a scowl.

"Why, when you lie upon your bed, knowing that you will never rise from it a live man, you will look back to see what charitable deeds you have performed; and I hope that the rescue of a crew from a burning vessel will be the most pleasant picture that you can conjure up."

"There's something in that, after all," the captain said; "and even if I don't carry a nigger to Havana for six months to come, it shan't be said that I run away from a burning vessel, and left the crew to starve in boats. Go on deck and alter the course of the schooner, and I will join you in a minute."

"What do you make of her?" the captain asked, as he waddled up some time afterwards.

"A ship, sir."

"And we are three miles from her at least?"

"Just about that distance, sir."

"At the rate we are moving through the water, we shan't be able to speak her for more than an hour," Murphy said. "Take the boat and four hands, and pull to the vessel, and do what you can to save the crew and the effects of the officers."

To hear was to obey.

As we approached the ship, I saw that the fire had communicated to the foremast, and was ascending with wonderful rapidity. I looked hard to discover if there was any one on board, but the deck appeared to be deserted, and the boats were not hanging at the davits.

"I don't see any one on deck, sir," said one of the men, pulling with one hand, and looking at the wreck. "It's my opinion that they have cleared. She looks like a greaser, and they don't stop long arter a fire's on board."

The man meant that she was a Spanish ship, and was manned by Spaniards.

"I've heard tell them 'ere fellers carry lots of yallar boys on

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their trips," cried one of the men, named Bill, a native of Maine, and a stout, active sailor.

"And if we could get hold of 'em, there'd be no one to deny our right to 'em," suggested another.

"Hadn't we better go alongside, sir?" asked the other oarsman. "We can get up by the mizzen channels, and the fire don't seem to make much headway as yet."

"Besides, some human critter may be on board jist as likely as not," Bill remarked, seeing that I still hesitated.

"We ought to save 'em if sich is the case," another remarked.

"If we are going to do it, we haven't got much time, I guess," said the Maine man.

"Give way, boys," I cried; "we will see what the old craft has on board."

The men dipped their oars into the water, and with one vigorous stroke sent the boat alongside, under the mizzen channel.

"Two of you stay in the boat, and stand ready to shove off at a second's warning," I said, as I swung myself into the channel by the aid of the chains.

The Maine man and Jack, who pulled the after oar, followed me on deck, where I saw, by a hurried glance, that the ship was about nine hundred tons' burden, and built for the accommodation of passengers. The decks were strewed with clothing and provisions, as though the crew had taken their departure in a hurry, and had not stopped to place in the boats one half the articles which they had collected. The smoke from the fire, owing to the light wind, arose in dark clouds, but did not reach that portion of the vessel upon which we stood.

"Now, then, let us search for the yaller boys," said Bill, springing from the poop deck and looking into the cabin, which was filled with smoke, — for it was rolling out of the doors and skylights in profusion.

Bill hesitated for a moment, and seemed undecided what to do. He found that there was more smoke than he bargained for.

"Down on your hands and knees, and creep," I said. The man took the hint, and disappeared.

I followed him in the same humble manner, and was agreeably surprised to find that the smoke was not so dense but that it could be borne in a recumbent position; and crept on until I suddenly found that I was rolling headlong down half a dozen

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steps, and for a few minutes was somewhat bewildered by my fall. I looked around, and as the smoke was not very thick, I could see that I had fallen down the steps of the lower cabin, which must have been used by lady passengers, for on the transom were lying a guitar, needle-work, and a lady's dresses, or what I supposed to be the rigging of a woman, for I did not stop to examine them. I was just about to take a look into a state-room when I heard hard breathing, and in the next moment there was a loud crash, something similar to that which I had made a few moments before, and down the steps rolled Bill, one of my boat's crew, who, in making his examination upon his hands, had fallen into the same way that I had.

"Blast me, Mr. Robert, but is this you?" he asked, in surprise. "How did you get here, sir? I rolled down the steps."

"O, I found the steps," I replied, for I didn't care about exposing my method of descending them; and the answer was satisfactory.

"Haven't found any treasure yet — have you, sir?" Bill asked.

"Not a cent."

"Nor I, but I think that there must be some in the transom. I'll look and see."

He wrenched off the covering, and while he was at work, I looked into the state-rooms. I found that they had undoubtedly been occupied during the passage, for various articles were scattered upon the deck; and while I was feeling in one of the berths to see if any person had been left behind, my hand came in contact with a small box, not larger than a man's hand. It felt cold and heavy, so I had the curiosity to hold it close to my eyes for the purpose of seeing what it was composed of. It was of yellow metal, and perhaps gold, although the light was so bad that I could not tell precisely. I saw that there was a small key in the box, which I put in my pocket; and then thrust the casket in the bosom of my shirt, and continued my investigations.

I had already examined three state-rooms, and found nothing that was worth carrying off, excepting the casket which I have alluded to, so after glancing at Bill, and seeing that he was hard at work upon the transom with an axe, which he had found somewhere, I opened the door of the last state-room, on the starboard side; but the door was obstructed by something, and I was compelled to press hard before I could gain a sufficient space to admit

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my head and body. I am afraid I was not very gentle, for I recollect uttering an oath as I stepped into the room, and trod upon something that made my heart beat quick with apprehension.

I stooped down and felt with my hands; they came in contact with flesh; and by a little manipulation I was enabled to make out that upon the deck was the body of a female, but whether dead or alive was a question which I did not dare to ask myself, or to answer if I had. I took the insensible form in my arms, and as I did so thought that I could detect the faint throbbing of a heart beneath my hand, and the face, although I could not see it distinctly for the smoke, was soft and warm as it touched my own bearded phiz.

"Have ye found anything, Mr. Robert?" asked Bill, as I entered the cabin.

"Yes," I replied, steering for the steps.

"What is it — silver and gold, sir?" he asked.

"No, something better," I responded.

"Not diamonds, sartinly?" he asked, as he approached me.

I made no response, but Bill was determined to see what I had, and stuck close until he got a glimpse of the clothes, then returned to the transom in disgust, muttering, —

"Darned if the mate ain't carrying off all the bedclothes, as though we hadn't got fleas enough on board of the Coquette now!" and then through the smoke I saw him return to the transom, and recommence his search for gold.

I held my breath when I reached the main cabin, and rushed for the steps, still bearing my burden in my arms. I knew the direction of the door which led on deck, and reached it, although most suffocated for the want of air. Through the door I staggered and reached the deck, where I fell gasping for breath, and with a strange dizziness in my head, that, for a few seconds, rendered me almost unconscious of my burden or myself. But I revived sufficiently to know that the woman whom I had carried in my arms needed some attention; and once more lifting her, I gained the poop deck, where fresh air was to be obtained, and where the smoke had not yet reached.

Then, for the first time, I looked at the face of my burden, and by the bright light which the burning foremast afforded, was astonished at its wonderful, its heavenly beauty. She was a young girl, not more than sixteen years of age, with dark hair, long and

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very profuse, with skin that was so pure and white, it looked like polished marble more than flesh. For a few seconds I could not move, so entranced was I by the looks of that face; but I suddenly recollected that if I wished to save so much loveliness, it was necessary I should take some measures to restore the lady to consciousness; but I hardly knew how to go to work, for somehow I felt even to touch her hand would be a sin on my part. I tried her pulse, and it beat a faint response to the pressure of my fingers, and then I placed my hand near the region of her heart, and was overjoyed to find that its pulsations had not ceased. I knew that a little water would do more than anything else to restore her, and cast my eyes over the deck to find the scuttle butt, but it was on the forward part and surrounded by flames. I recollected that we had a water keg in the boat, and flew to the mizzen chains, looked over, and saw that the two men were still in her.

"Jack," I said, "pass me up a pot of water, and bear a hand."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the man; and then looking up he asked, "Have you found anything, sir, that is worth carrying off?"

"Yes."

"What is it, sir?" the man asked, pausing in the act of pouring out the water.

"You will soon know; so bear a hand with the water," I replied.

Jack obeyed, but I could hear him mutter to his companion, —

"They have got a box of gold; now mind what I say."

The water was passed up, and with it I hurried to the lady, who did not manifest any signs of consciousness. I raised her head and poured a little down her throat, and then bathed her face and forehead; but there were no signs of life. I was almost in despair, but I did not relax my efforts. I chafed her hands, and as she had on loose sleeves I rubbed her arms until they were aglow with friction, and once more I poured a few drops of water in her mouth — a mouth that looked radiant with small teeth, white as pearls, — and to my intense satisfaction my patient uttered a sigh and half opened her eyes, but immediately closed them again as though the awakening was painful.

Just at this moment, when my anxiety was the most intense, Bill staggered from the cabin, blinded and almost choked by the smoke, bearing in his arms a box that was about ten inches long and five wide.

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"Hang me if I hain't found the greaser's money," he shouted, as soon as he was able. "I've got one box, and there's more of 'em."

He came close to me and deposited his box, and then looked at my precious charge for a moment.

"Don't you think, Mr. Robert," he asked, "that it's best to let the woman go, and do what we can to save the money?"

"You brute!" I said, "would you leave the girl to die for the sake of a few pounds of gold or silver?"

"Ah," he answered, "I wouldn't give that box for all the women in the land of the greasers."

"Then go for more, and leave me to tend this poor girl, who, for aught that I know, may be dying. Call up the men in the boat, and get out what you can; and work lively, for the flames are coming aft."

"Ay, ay, sir," he returned, rather gruffly; and in a moment the other men were on deck, and followed Bill into the cabin, although I heard them whisper that the "mate would have another woman in tow afore long."

I again bathed my patient's head and face, and then had the satisfaction of seeing a pair of dark eyes open and look around with the most intense astonishment.

For a few moments after the lady opened her eyes, she gazed at me fixedly, as though she knew not where she was, or what had happened. Then her eyes were turned to the fire, and, uttering a faint moan, she covered them with her hands.

"Fear nothing, senorita," I said, speaking in the Spanish tongue. "You are with friends, and those who will save you."

She listened in silence, and then uncovered her eyes, and looked at me attentively. I don't think she saw anything to alarm her, for the terror which she manifested gradually disappeared, and at length she spoke.

"Who are you?" she asked; and I observed that, as she spoke, she gradually attempted to withdraw her form from my arms, at which act I felt grieved, but did not make objections.

"I am an officer," I replied.

"But not on board of this ship," she said. "I have no recollection of ever having seen your face before."

"You are right, senorita," I replied, most respectfully, and still speaking in the Spanish tongue, which I judged was her

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native language. "Had I been an officer on board of this ship," I continued, "I should never have left so much grace and loveliness to perish by fire. It was cowardly to do so."

"They forgot me," she said; "the saints pardon them, but they must have forgotten that I was on board."

"And when you awoke," I said, "you found the ship deserted?"

"I know not; but there was smoke in the state-room, and I sought to reach the deck by passing through the cabin. I was bewildered and terrified, and driven back. I had just sense enough to open the ventilator, and recollect nothing more. I cannot find words to express my gratitude, but my father shall, if we ever see him."

"May I ask the name of your father, senorita?" I inquired.

"Don Ingracia, of the plantation of St. Filipe," she answered.

"Ten miles from Havana?" I asked.

"The same, senor."

Her father was, then, the richest man in Cuba. I had heard of him often, as being a large owner of slaves, and the possessor of several plantations in the department of St. Filipe.

"And how could he trust his daughter such a distance from home?" I asked.

"Simply because I begged him to let me visit Spain, for the purpose of seeing the country and my relatives."

Her eyes filled with tears, and she covered them with her hands, and remained silent. I did not interrupt her grief; but was looking at her, and wishing that I had the power to console her, when my men emerged from the cabin, blinded and choked by the smoke, which was increasing rapidly. They dashed the boxes which they carried on the deck, and rushed upon the poop for air, which they inhaled as though dying for the want of it.

"Have you got all?" I asked.

"All that we can find, sir, owing to this smoke. Curse it, I'm almost strangled," replied Jack.

"Then into the boat with the boxes," I said. "The fire is spreading aft rapidly, and in a few minutes will reach the magazine."

The men recovered from their coughing fit, and commenced lowering the boxes into the boat. There were six of them, and

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each box weighed as much as a hundred pounds, judging from the manner in which the men handled them.

"The boxes are all aboard, sir," said Bill. "Shall we put the gal into the boat, too?"

"No, you brute. I will place her there myself. I can't trust you."

"Senorita," I said, "we must leave the ship, for the fire will soon spread to the quarter-deck. We belong to a vessel which is not more than half a mile from us, and on board of her you will meet with a warm welcome, and with one of your own sex."

She gave me her hand as I spoke, and arose. I led her to the rail, but at the sight of the boat, so far beneath, her heart almost failed, and she shrank back.

"Better let us put a whip on the crotchet yard, sir, and whip her into the boat by the aid of a strap just below her flippers."

The advice which the man offered was not to be entertained for a moment. The wretch wanted me to put a strap around her slight waist, and hoist her into the boat like a barrel of sugar.

"Fear nothing, senorita," I said, when she shrunk back. "I will land you in the boat without accident;" and as I spoke, I put my arm around her waist, lifted her gently from the deck, and stepped into the channel. Then grasping one of the chains, I placed one foot upon the sheathing, and was within a few inches of the boat.

"Now, senorita," I said, "let go your hold and trust to me."

She did so, and I held her for a moment with my right arm, pressed close to my heart, and the next instant I reached the boat in safety, and deposited my lovely burden in the stern-sheets.

"Come on, boys," I said; "we have saved all that we can from the ship."

The men tumbled over the rail, and were in the boat in a moment.

"Shove off," I cried; and with a few strokes of the oars the boat was sent some distance from the burning vessel.

"Where's the Coquette, sir?" asked Jack; and the men lay on their oars and looked for the schooner; but owing to the light of the burning vessel, we could see but a short distance.

Suddenly a blue light flashed over the water, about half a mile off our starboard quarter.

"There's the old lady, sure 'nuff. I knew they wouldn't desert

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us," Bill cried; and dipping the oars into the water, the boat was headed towards the schooner.

We gained the side of the slaver, when Murphy looked over the rail in surprise.

"Another petticoat, by George," he said. "Where in the devil's name did you pick her up?"

"Hush," I replied, softly; "we have got a prize, and one better than six hundred slaves."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"She is the daughter of Don Ingracia, the rich planter of Cuba. We found her on board, having been deserted by the cowardly crew."

"The devil!" whistled Murphy. "You have made a strike, and no mistake. Pass her up, and let me have a look at her."

We had steps for the lady to go up the side of the vessel; and, by my assistance, she was soon landed on deck and conducted to the cabin, where Isadora received her with true woman's kindness; and together they disappeared in a state-room, where we left them to exchange confidences if they pleased. Just at that moment the second mate came for orders.

"Where'll you have them 'ere boxes put, sir?" he asked.

"How many are there?" asked Murphy.

"Six, sir, and cussed heavy."

"Do you know what's in 'em?" asked the captain.

"I haven't the slightest idea," I replied, "but I think they contain silver or gold."

"Bring 'em aft," cried Murphy, "and send the carpenter here. We'll soon see."

The crew were excited, and crowded aft, as far as they dared, to get a glimpse of the contents of the boxes.

"Bring a lantern here, steward," Murphy roared; and when the light was brought, a few vigorous blows removed the cover of a box, and the glitter of gold met our eager gaze.

"Hurrah!" roared Murphy; "yaller boys, by —."

"Our forten's made now, for sarten," cried one of the men; and for a moment the crew crowded around the box, and forgot all discipline.

"Hullo!" cried the captain, looking up and finding that he was surrounded by his men; "what in the devil's name are you doing here? Go forward, all of you."

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"We only want to see what the boxes contain, captain," one of the men said. "We had hard work to git 'em, and it's only right that we should know what's what."

Murphy made no reply, but he walked quietly up to the man, and struck him a blow that sent him reeling into the scuppers.

"Blast yer, will you stop to dispute my orders agin?" the captain said. "When I give an order, I want it obeyed. Do you mind that?"

The crew began to slink forward, but did not say a word, excepting Bill, who was knocked down.

"I didn't mean anything that wasn't right, cap'n," he said.

"O, you didn't — did you? Then don't do it again, my man, 'cos I'm not to be trifled with."

The men went forward without a murmur that we could hear, and I felt very thankful for it; for I was dying with fear that the new arrival would hear the disturbance, and get alarmed at her first appearance on board a slaver.

"Did the woman notice that you had the boxes in the boat?" asked the captain, rather hoarsely, when he saw the amount of gold that was glittering before him.

I saw that the "old man" had one of his avarice fits on, by the tones of his voice.

"Of course she did," I replied.

"Can't you persuade her that what she saw was nothing but old iron, or mayhap a lot of grub, or somethin' of that sort?" he whispered.

"I think that she feels so grateful at being saved, that she will say nothing about the gold," I remarked.

"But I ain't going to risk any such thing. I mean to know whether she'll blab, or keep her mouth shut, or say that she saw nothing. That's what I'm going to do."

"But how?" I asked.

"Look here," the captain said, speaking low and confidentially; "she's an heiress, or what do you call a girl what has got money? Well, never mind that. Her dad has got the rocks — four or five million, I s'pose; and she'll get it all, 'cos he's old and his wife is dead. Now, what's to prevent me from splicing her, and making her happy through life?"

"Suppose the lady should refuse you?" I suggested.

"She can't," was the answer.

"Why not?"

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"Because, in the first place, she is in our power, and we can do with her as we please. In the next place, I don't see why she should object to the match, for I've got money as well as she. Shiver my timbers, but I might take my pick from girls just as pretty. What do you think of the project?"

"To tell you the truth, I think that we shall make more to restore her to her father uninjured," I said. "His liberality will be more likely to be roused if the girl reports that she was treated well."

"I shall trust only to certainties," was the answer. "Either she shall marry you or me before she leaves the vessel."

"But I have some one now to look after."

"Well, you wouldn't object to a change — would you? Couldn't we contrive to leave her at Gabun? Accidentally, of course. Old Cringy would give a hundred niggers for the girl, and jump at the bargain. Couldn't we divide them between us, and make something pretty out of it?"

I listened in silence to this infamous proposition. I knew that I should only make an enemy, and a powerful one, if I rejected it at once, and thereby make Isadora's situation extremely unpleasant.

"You will think of the matter," the captain said, with a sharp look.

"Yes; I will turn it over in my mind," I replied.

"We can make ten thousand dollars apiece by the operation, and that will give us a start in the world. The woman would be treated well, I suppose, and that will be enough for you to know."

I could hardly control my indignation when I heard the proposition; but I succeeded in disguising my real sentiments, and appeared as though I would give the subject some attention. We talked no more that night on the project, but returned to the boxes which were lying on deck, and wrenched the covers from them, and our greedy eyes were rewarded by the sight of more gold in the shape of doubloons; and as we found in each box a paper containing the amount of money and the names of the owners, we had no difficulty in arriving at a definite result. We found that we had rescued from the flames some three hundred thousand dollars, which purported to belong to the senors Morsecio & Co., Cadiz, Spain; and when we discovered the fact, we wished the senors might get it, but we rather thought that they would not.

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As the boxes were stowed below, the burning vessel, which was about half a mile distant, sent up a dozen streaks of bright flame, and then an explosion followed, and for a few seconds we could see hundreds of fragments in the air, all flaming like rockets, darting in every direction; and then followed the sullen plunges as the timbers struck the water, and the hissing sounds as the fire was quenched by the same. A few cinders struck the deck, but they were harmless, and there was no danger that our sails would take fire from them. As soon as the explosion was over, I entered the cabin, and knocked at the door of my state-room. Isadora opened it.

"Do not come in, sir," she said, softly. "The lady has laid down, and is asleep."

"O, no, I am not," Gracia — the name of the new comer — answered; "let my preserver enter, by all means."

I saw a frown — a slight one — upon Isadora's brow, and I knew that the first pang of jealousy had been sown. I heeded the sign, and declined entering.

"Isadora," I said, kissing away the frown in a quiet way, "let the stranger occupy the room with you to-night, and to-morrow we will find out what can be done for her accommodation."

"And you are sure that you still love but me?" Isadora whispered, as she left the room, and put her arms around my neck.

"But you, love," I answered, returning the kiss; and she was satisfied.

I retired to one of the vacant state-rooms for the purpose of getting a few hours' sleep during my watch below. I kicked off my shoes, and was about to "turn in," when I recollected the casket which I had found upon the Virgin, the name of the ship that was burned. I removed it from its place of concealment, and examined it by the light. The box was of gold, beautifully engraved and chased, and contained the arms of some Spanish family, whom I cared but precious little about. I inserted the key in the lock, opened the box, and my eyes were gratified with the sight of sparkling jewels of real antique pattern and setting. I looked at them for a moment without speaking, I was so astonished, and then I arose and carefully locked the door of my state-room, for fear that some one would surprise me.

After locking the door I seated myself, and examined the jewels

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at leisure. I found that there was a necklace terminating with a cross, all studded with diamonds of large size, the smallest weighing, I judged, over a carat, and the largest one about six carats. I counted the stones, and found that there were forty in the necklace, and ten in the cross. I laid the cross and necklace aside, and took up the next jewel. It was a breastpin, of large size and clumsy setting, but was rich with diamonds of great size, and contained twenty, with one in the centre, an immense stone and very brilliant, for it flashed all the colors of the rainbow, as I held it towards the light for inspection. It was the largest diamond I had ever seen, and probably had been in some family for centuries, as an heirloom. I admired the beauty of the pin for some time. before I passed on to the next articles, which were a pair of bracelets, of very heavy pattern, and studded with diamonds of great price. The ends, which clasped together, were composed of emeralds, of extraordinary brilliancy, and as large as a man's thumb. There were fifty diamonds in each bracelet, and each diamond weighed, I judged, about two carats. I laid them aside, and continued my investigation.

The next articles I examined were a pair of ear-rings, of an antique pattern, and each ear-ring contained one large diamond, brilliant as the evening star, and large as a small filbert. From the ear-rings I passed on to the rest of the jewelry, and found it consisted of finger-rings, set with diamonds of various kinds, from a cluster, containing a dozen small diamonds, not weighing more than two carats each, to a single-stone ring, which weighed seven or eight carats. There were about a dozen rings, and some of them were evidently intended for masculine hands, for I slipped several upon my fingers without much trouble. There was but one other article that remained to be examined, and I found that it was a cross, emblematical of some title of nobility. It was three inches long and three inches broad, and was covered with diamonds and rubies of large size and wonderful brilliancy.

Had Murphy not made his infamous proposition, I think I should have let him share my good fortune; but I was suspicious of him, and determined to keep the matter a secret, even from Isadora, fearful that something might happen, and that she would betray me. While I was thus meditating, I heard some one try my door. Hastily replacing the articles in the casket, I threw it into a berth, and covered it with a blanket, and then unlocked the door, and saw Murphy.

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"I saw that you had not turned in," the captain said, "and I didn't know but you was sick. You are all right, I hope."

"Never felt better in my life," I answered. "I was thinking of the doings of the day, and was too nervous to sleep; so I sat here and smoked. Won't you join me?"

"No, no; turn in and get some rest. We have got a stiff breeze, and a fair one."

"How do you intend to divide the money that we found to-day?" I asked.

"According to rank," he answered. "The largest portion will remain aft.'

"And suppose the boys grumble," I remarked.

"Let 'em grumble until they are hoarse. Their grumbling can't move me. We ain't going to navigate and run risk for the sake of making the fortens of every Jack tar that thinks he is smart. By no means;" and with this advice, the captain waddled out of the state-room, and turned in.

I determined to hold on to the diamonds at all hazards, and for that reason locked them up in one of my chests, which was in the state-room. I took good care that the casket was put into a secret drawer, the existence of which no one knew but myself. By this time it was eight bells, or four o'clock in the morning, and my watch on deck. I found the second mate in a sociable mood, for the wind was fair, and we were making eight knots per hour.

"You haven't had much of a nap," the second mate said. "I've seen a light in your state-room ever since you've been below. I don't feel much like sleep myself, 'cos I've been thinking what a haul we made to-day, and how I should spend my money. I'll give up eating old hoss and ministers' faces, and have a farm and lots of pigs, and not turn out every time the wind blows fresh to help reef fore and aft sails."

"And before you have been on shore six months, you will forget your resolutions, and ship once more. I've seen such things before," I replied.

"Not a bit of it," was the answer; and then the officer sunk his voice to a whisper, as he said, "That's a fine-looking craft you brought alongside to-day."

I knew that he alluded to Gracia; so I said that she looked very well.

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"Now, what's to become of her? that's the question. We are going to Africa, and she wants to go to Cuba. It's a long time afore she'll see her friends, and she'll need some one to look arter her — won't she?"

I remarked that probably she would.

"Now s'pose I should offer to marry her, and make her an honest woman. What should you say to that?"

"But the lady has had but a slight acquaintance with you," said I.

"What does it matter?"

"Not much, sometimes, but ladies of a high grade of society require fortune and many accomplishments, before they consent to give their hands."

"Blast it, Mr. Robert, ain't I accomplished?" cried the officer, indignantly. "Can't I knot a rope, steer a ship, splice, or reef a sail with any man on board?"

"That is true," I replied, with a smile; "but you know that she is not aware of all those good qualities."

"But I can tell her — can't I?" the man asked, quite indignantly.

"Yes, after you have learned the Spanish language. Think how inconvenient it would be to have a wife that you couldn't talk with."

"O, I could learn her the English lingo in no time, if I only had time, and a chance. No fear of that."

"Well, I advise you to make application without delay, for the captain also has thoughts in that direction;" and while I spoke, I looked the man full in the face to see what effect my announcement would make.

His countenance changed immediately, and I saw that he was disappointed, and somewhat revengefully inclined.

"O, if the captain intends to enter the ring, I s'pose I must step out," he said.

The second mate, after asking me to say nothing about the conversation that had occurred, retired below, and left me in possession of the quarter-deck, and I fell to ruminating. My first object was to save the lady, and that I resolved to do at all hazards, even if I had to venture my life in her defence; yet I felt that it would not do to have arrayed against me both captain and second mate, for they could make my position a little un-

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comfortable, and perhaps give me a knock on the head that would not be agreeable. I knew Murphy would stand my friend just as long as it was for his interest to do so, and no longer. At least I suspected him of just so much attachment and no more, and I thought that I would govern my love by his. The lady should be saved, but how to do it and save myself was a question which I determined to let time alone solve. I thought that with two things to breed disaffection on board, unmarried women and boxes of gold, a row could not be staved off a great while; and even while I was thus meditating, one of the men approached me as though about to ask something regarding ship's duty.

"Well, Sam, what is it?" I inquired.

"Will you please to step for'ard, sir, a little ways? Just by the waist, for instance."

I complied with the request, and looked to see what was coming next.

"What I am goin' to say, sir, I don't want repeated, 'cos I'm a friend to you. Will you promise not to say a word to any one, sir?"

"I can't do that, Sam, for your communication may be so important that I shall have to report it to the captain."

"Then I shan't trust you, sir," the man said.

"Very well," I replied, carelessly. "If you want to tell me that you don't get grub enough, or that you want plum duff three times a week, or that the junk is not fat, I'll listen and say nothing. So square your yards and fire away."

"'Tain't that, sir," he replied, sinking his voice to a whisper, after looking carefully around. "We feel a little grieved for'ard, that the skipper should use us as he did to-night, and not give us a sight at the gold. Some of the boys say that the skipper is going to claim the whole of it, but I don't think that he will serve us in that way. Now I want to ax you, Mr. Robert, what you think of it. Will he do the right thing?"

"I don't know what you call the right thing," I said, evasively.

The man thought for a moment to see how he could express himself more plainly.

"What I mean, sir, will he count the money out and say here's one for Dick, one for Sam, one for Bill, four for me, and so on. That's what we expect, and that is right; but we can't stand his taking all, 'cos 'tain't right."

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"The captain will settle the matter to suit himself, and perhaps all hands," I replied, and was about to turn aft, when Sam touched me with his hand.

"You won't say nothing 'bout this nor nothing, will you, Mr. Robert? We all believes you an honest man, and willing to do the fair thing, and I shouldn't like to have a row just now with the captain. You won't say anything — will you, Mr. Robert?"

"I have nothing to tell," I replied, as I walked aft; but I knew that I was not speaking the truth, for I had but to hint at the conversation which had been uttered, and the man's life would not have been worth a sixpence in the estimation of the captain.

Just as I reached the quarter-deck, after conversing with Sam, I saw Isadora issue from the cabin.

"Good morning, my dear," I said. "Your eyes look as bright as the Coquette's copper, and your cheeks are as flushed as the first streak of the rising sun. You have slept well."

"No, I have slept badly. But I have come on deck for instructions. The lady has awakened, and is dressed in some of my clothing, and I have bound up her hair, and answered a few of her questions."

"Please to tell me what questions the lady has put," I said.

"The senorita Gracia asked me what kind of a vessel she was on board of, and where she was bound."

"And your answer?"

"I told her that the Coquette was a trader, and went I didn't know where, because this was my first voyage with my husband. She don't suspect but that we are married, and I'm sure I am glad that she don't."

"And this is all of the conversation — is it?" I asked.

"Yes, all; for I came on deck, leaving the senorita very thoughtful, as though she was homesick. Besides, I feared that she would ask me more questions, and I did not know if you wanted them answered."

"You are an angel," I said, and repaid her with an embrace that nearly took away her breath. "Now go down and send the lady up to take the fresh air, and I will explain all that is necessary for her to know."

"And do you want my company, also?" Isadora asked, with an arch smile.

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I thought that I could dispense with it for a few moments, but took good care not to say so.

"Certainly. You know that I like to have you near me at all times."

"Then I'll punish you by staying below until you have explained the nature of the schooner's business, for I fear that Gracia will feel shocked when she knows it."

The bright eyes disappeared, and I had hardly time to take a dozen paces on the deck, when the senorita Gracia appeared, looking so beautiful in one of Isadora's morning dresses, that I took off my hat and bowed to her as though she had been a goddess, and I her slave.

"You are welcome upon deck so early, lady," I said, speaking so low and respectfully, that I saw her black eyes raised to my face, and rest there for a moment, as though flattered by her reception.

"You are sure that I don't interrupt your duties?" she asked, with a smile so sweet, yet melancholy, that I could have fallen down and worshipped her, if it would have done any good; but as it wouldn't, I stood on my legs, although they trembled. I assured her that she did not interrupt me.

"I have passed a pleasant night," she said. "For it I must thank your wife."

She raised her dark eyes as she spoke, and I felt the blood rush to my face under the scrutiny. I hardly knew what to say, and while I was trying to frame a reply, Murphy waddled on deck.

"You turn out early, young lady," Murphy said, sourly. "I suppose that you have come up to thank the mate for saving your life. Well, I've done as much as he, even if he did bring some boxes on board filled with old iron, thinking they contained gold."

He spoke in English, which she understood remarkably well.

"I am very sorry you did not find something more worthy of your trouble. If I could have had my wish, the boxes should have been filled with gold," Gracia said, most sincerely.

"Well, we can't all have our wishes; if we could, you'd be wishing that you was on your father's plantation, and Mr. Robert that he was alongside of his affinity."

I saw the lady look up with an expression of surprise upon her fine face, at hearing his rude words.

"I should certainly wish I was at home," was Gracia's answer,

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"and I hope to prevail upon you to take me there. You will be well paid, I assure you."

"We should lose the profits of our voyage, if we did," Murphy said, calculating upon his fingers what they would amount to. "No, we can't run back just now, 'cos 'twould interfere with our plans; but we will take care of you, and see that you are returned to your father in good time."

The lady shaded her eyes with her hands, as though she wanted to conceal the tears which flowed from them. She did not speak, and Murphy, thinking that he had made a profound impression, winked to me to notice his success, and then waddled below again.

"Tell me," she said, speaking low and distinct, "the character of this vessel, for I begin to have my suspicions that it is not an honest trader."

"Do not be alarmed," I replied. "I will defend you if there is occasion for defence. Trust to my direction, and you will fare well enough."

"But the character of the vessel?" she asked, impatiently.

"Is a slaver," I replied.

She drew a long sigh, and remained in deep thought for a few minutes.

"I owe my life to you," she said, extending her hand, "and I feel deeply grateful; but I almost wish that you had left me on board of the burning ship. O, how I wish I was with my father!"

"You shall yet be with him; but a few weeks must pass before that happy result will take place. We are not so bad as we seem."

Just then Isadora returned to the deck, and both ladies preferred to remain with me instead of keeping below. I left them to talk as they pleased, and attended to my duty, for the purpose of keeping the men at work, and out of idleness. I swayed up the sails, had the deck scrubbed clean, and tautened all the sheets, so that the canvas set like a ball-room belle's dress. By the time I had finished, eight bells struck, and breakfast was prepared for the cabin, and also ready for the morning watch. Gracia merely tasted of the food that was set before her, but Isadora had no idea of starving, and ate as heartily as a lover could desire. The conversation was not particularly enlivening, and I was glad when the meal was finished and Gracia was enabled to retire to her state-room, and mourn for her home in secret.

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"You know what I spoke to you about last night," Murphy said, as soon as the ladies had retired.

I pretended to think.

"I mean about the marrying of that gal. The more I see of her, the more I am convinced that now is the time to cut my cloth for my jib. If I can find a missionary at Gabun, she shall take me for better or worse, or I'll make her life rather uncomfortable."

I made no reply, but wished that he might strangle before he rose from the table.

"I shall do the right thing in case I succeed, and I want you to help me steer correct, and board the craft without any fuss. If you do, the money which we saved from the Spaniard needn't be circulated out of the cabin."

"I don't like the plan," I said. "I had rather the men should share dollar for dollar, than take a cent from them which I was not entitled to."

The captain turned very red in the face, and wanted to make an angry reply; but thought better of it, and got up from the table and went on deck. As he did so, I saw the steward's face in the pantry, and it did not look very amiable, for I was confident that he had heard every word, and would report the conversation to the crew; and I did not care much if he did, as long as I stood well on the subject which we had talked about.

Time passed heavily with me until we made the land, because I was in a continual fever for fear the captain would say something to Gracia that would wound her feelings or insult her modesty. In the mean time, it did not escape me that there was some deep current in the affairs of the crew, for I saw them frequently consulting together, and whispering as though they were debating upon matters of great importance.

At length, one pleasant afternoon, the cry of "Land, ho,' started every one on deck, and in an hour's time, we could make out the high bluff just beyond Gabun, and in two hours' time we could see the flag-staff on the bluff, upon which Cringy's house was situated.

In a few minutes, or as soon as those on shore could make out that we were bound for Gabun, a canoe was launched and paddled by half a dozen strong arms towards us, and in the stern-sheets we could discover the deformed carcass of Cringy dressed

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in his regimentals, and destitute of trousers, as when he came into the world. We hove to for him to scramble on board, and as soon as he landed on deck, his delight knew no bounds, as far as outward appearances went.

"Bress de Lord for dis," he cried. "Dis does look as dough dare was sum luck in de world, arter all. Ah, I prayed for dis, but feared dat my prayers no come when I ax 'em. Well, you is all well, I hope, and de Lord be praised, you all looks well."

Some rum was brought on deck, and when the steward placed it in the old darky's hand, the eyes of the latter sparkled with joy, and he rolled up his optics until only the whites were to be seen.

"The ladies want to know if they can come on deck, sir?" the steward asked.

"Not at present," I replied, as I looked at old Cringy's naked limbs, which were not remarkable for symmetry and plumpness. "Tell them I will call them when wanted."

The steward left to do his errand, and with a sigh of satisfaction, old Cringy threw the rum down his throat and smacked his lips.

"Look ahere, old man," Murphy said. "You must cover up those crooked legs of yours, for we have ladies on board, and they don't care about seeing so much ugliness. What's your trousers?"

"In de canoe, bress de Lord," replied Cringy. "De water in de canoe spile de cloth, and I roll 'em up and give my man set on."

"Well, on with them, for the ladies want to come on deck and see you," I said.

"O, go way, and don't tell me dat you got ladies on board. I s'pose dat you got nigger wench, and dat she feel proud now. Go 'long wid you, and let me see how much she sell for."

"She won't come until the trousers are on," I said, gravely; and Cringy saw that I was not joking; so going to the gangway, he shouted to his henchman, and the pants were thrown at him and slipped on, the fellow talking all the time.

Then the ladies came on deck, and their appearance excited the deepest feeling of admiration in the heart of the old negro.

"Ah, dat's what I call de real lubliness," cried Cringy. "Dose wumen worth two dozen black wenches. Ah, s'pose I own one, I be great man, and all de nigger chiefs be mad."

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"What does the monster say?" demanded Isadora.

"He says that you are beautiful," I replied.

"He has got some taste, at any rate, even if he is hideous," replied the amiable young lady, who felt somewhat consoled by the compliment.

"How many slaves would you give for one of them, Cringy?" asked Murphy, in a joking tone, apparently, although I knew better.

"Let me see. Dey am all white — ain't dey? No nigger blood, hey? Got plenty of dat ashore."

"O, I will warrant that they are pure blooded. Come, make an offer, and we'll see how high you estimate them."

"No sell 'em both?" asked Cringy

"No, only one. How many niggers?"

"S'pose I give dirty for dis one," said Cringy, in a hesitating manner, pointing to Isadora.

"Thirty niggers, you old rascal!" roared Murphy. "Do you dare to make such an offer to me? She's worth more."

"S'pose I say fifty, and call 'em mine," said Cringy, with an eager look.

"Fifty, you black wretch! Look at the woman, and see if she is not worth more."

Cringy looked, and the large black eyes of Isadora did the work.

"I gib one hundred nigger, and I no gib anudder cussed one," the old fellow muttered; and I have no doubt that he was in earnest.

"There, ladies, you can see how high you are valued," I said. "He offers one hundred negroes for either of you, and is not particular which."

"The old wretch, — don't he wish that he may get one of us?" Isadora said, with a disdainful toss of her head; but Gracia looked sober, and clung to her companion as though she feared that there was more in the talk than met the eye.

"What you say, cap'n? You trade with me? S'pose you do, I want de wifey to-night, and gib you niggers when you want 'em," Cringy said.

"O, you must talk to the mate about that, for he has charge of the women," Murphy said; and then the old wretch turned his whole battery of entreaties upon me, and begged me to take his

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hundred niggers and give him a white wifey. I put him off, and then, as we neared the bar, Cringy had to take us over, and until we dropped anchor I talked no more with him on the subject of his offers.

But the instant the anchor was down, the old wretch got into his boat and hurried on shore. I could hardly understand what he meant by leaving us so abruptly; but after a while his canoe came alongside loaded down with fruits, vegetables, chickens, eggs, and other articles which he thought would be acceptable to the palates of man and woman, after a sea voyage. The heart of the old monkey was touched, it was evident; for he sent word by his boatman that the articles were presents to the ladies, and we were to understand that no charge was to be made for them.

That night Murphy and I walked the deck, and held a long conversation. He renewed the subject of selling Isadora, and even hinted that, if she was set on shore, he could easily persuade Gracia to submit to his wishes, and pledge her hand to him as soon as a missionary was found; but I opposed the scheme, and tried to point out some of its most hateful features, but the captain was not reared in a school where sentiment was regarded, and he seemed to estimate women as things to speculate in and improve one's fortune, if possible, while I regarded them as someing to love and protect, and even die for, if necessity required.

"It is useless to argue the point further," I said, at length. "I regard Isadora as my property, and I shall never give my consent that she be separated from me, and least of all, that she pass into the hands of that hideous scoundrel. Why, she would strangle herself with her garter, if such a thing was suggested. As long as I live I shall protect her; and if all the negroes in Africa were offered to me, I would not consent to such an act of meanness."

The captain listened to me in silence.

"Well, what do you think of the other one?" he asked, at length. "We can get rid of her at a fair price, and no one the wiser. You can't claim the whole of her, certainly."

"I would rather put my revolver to her head and blow her brains out, than see her pass into Cringy's hands; and I think that she would thank me for the act. She must be reserved for a better fate than that."

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Murphy was about to make an angry reply, when we heard the splash of oars, and saw two or three canoes coming towards us from the shore.

"What in the devil's name are you doing there?" hailed Murphy.

There was no answer.

"If you don't answer me, you black rascals, I'll throw hot shot at you," the captain said, angrily.

In reply we heard the most unearthly sounds, as though all the groans of departed negroes were lumped together, and thrown at our heads. Shriller and shriller rose the noise, until we were at length compelled to acknowledge that what we heard was intended for music. For five minutes the tumult continued without intermission, and then it stopped, because lungs and muscle needed some rest.

"Dat leedle music for de leedies, cap'n," cried Cringy, with a chuckle of delight. "I hope dat dey hear 'em and love 'em."

"The old rascal is serenading them, and they are not awake to hear his sweet strains and do honor to his melody. I will call them, and let them enjoy the treat as well as ourselves."

I went below for that purpose, and had no trouble in turning out Isadora; but Gracia declared that she would not move, as she did not feel in a laughing humor. So I was forced to return to the deck with only Isadora, wearing but a thin mantle thrown over her head to shield her from the night dew, which was falling heavily, and is not regarded in a favorable light by the unacclimated.

We suffered the old man to continue his serenade, and when his men had blown themselves hoarse, and the drummers were tired out, they returned to the shore, Cringy first promising to call in the morning, and receive the thanks of the ladies for his music.

"Here is an admirer for you," I said to Isadora. "He not only supplies you with what is needful to eat, but charms your ear with music during the night."

"Yes; but I wish he would choose daylight the next time; for see, my head is quite damp with the falling dew."

The dear girl shuddered as she spoke, as though suffering from a chill. I pressed her in my arms and kissed her, and for a few minutes her head rested upon my shoulder, and her arms were

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thrown around my neck. She did not speak, and I supposed was busy with thoughts of the past.

"O, my head!" she said, at length, pressing her hand upon her forehead, which I found was very hot.

"What is the matter, my dear?" I asked, tenderly.

"My head aches as though it would burst," she murmured; "yet a few minutes since I was well. My flesh feels as though it was on fire. What can be the matter with me?"

I feared that she had caught the coast fever, but I did not tell her so. The night air had poisoned her system as completely as though she had taken a dose of arsenic. I soothed her as well as I was able, and almost carried her into the cabin and state-room occupied by herself and Gracia.

A light was burning in the room, and by it I saw that Gracia was lying upon her bed sleeping soundly. I awoke her, and informed her that Isadora was ill, and needed some attention, which, perhaps, she would know how to administer better than myself.

"My friend ill," she said, astonished at the information. "Why it seems but a few minutes since she went on deck."

She arose hastily, but did not need to dress, for her clothes were already on, and then with true woman's sympathy assisted me with Isadora's garments; and at length we had the poor girl upon her bed, and were endeavoring in some manner to alleviate her pains, which were all concentrated in her head, while her temples throbbed like a human heart when deeply agitated.

"What can I do for you, Isadora?" I asked, overwhelmed with grief at her suffering.

"I do not know," she moaned. "My head feels as though it would burst, and my mouth is parched with heat. Let me drink some cool water, and perhaps it will do me good."

I gave her a glassful, and she drank it, but still asked for more; and, by Gracia's advice, I let her drink as much as she wanted. She then began to doze, and leaving Gracia to watch by her side, I went on deck, where I found Murphy.

"Well, how is she?" he asked.

"Very sick," I replied.

"And what have you done for her?" the captain continued.

"Nothing but let her drink as much water as she pleases," I replied.

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The captain gave a prolonged whistle.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You have done it with a vengeance," he said.

"Done what?" I asked.

"Why, given her just the same as rank pizen. She'll be a goner in less than twenty-four hours. You see if she don't. Medicine can't save her.

He finished his cigar and walked below, leaving me to my own reflections, and very bitter ones they were; for as I paced the deck, I thought of my past life and the little good there was in it, and I made a vow to reform as soon as the voyage was up, when I could retire from the business in which I was engaged; and while I was thus repenting, Gracia came on deck.

"For Heaven's sake don't expose yourself to this midnight air," I said, as soon as she reached the deck. "The sickness of Isadora is as much as I can endure."

"Do not fear for me," she replied; "I have a thick shawl on, and I shall stop but a moment. I came to call you, for Isadora is much worse, and is delirious."

I followed the lady into the cabin, and then entered the stateroom, where poor Isadora was rolling her head from side to side, and moaning as though in great pain. I knew not what to give her to ease the pain or relieve the fever, and would have been glad to have seen an English man-of-war enter the harbor, even if I was consigned to a prison, for the purpose of obtaining a physician.

I passed an arm under the head of the sick girl, and pressed my lips to her forehead. The act seemed to restore her to a consciousness of my presence, for she opened her eyes and smiled upon me.

"I feared that you had deserted me," she whispered. "I dreamed so just now. I thought you no longer loved me, and that another claimed your vows."

"Do not let such thoughts disturb you," I replied. "You know that I love you, and am bound to you until —"

I paused, and recollected that I was talking with one who might never arise alive from her bed.

"Death, you mean," she said, her eyes growing more brilliant and wild as she spoke.

I made no reply.

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"You made such a vow," she continued, "but I expected that your heart was like other men's; but I soon saw that you were sincere, and truly loved me, and then I gave all my affections in your keeping, and did hope that we should enjoy years of happiness; but we never shall."

"Do not be too sure of that," I replied. "You will take some medicine, and awake in the morning much better; then we will lay out more plans for the future. Now sleep, and I will watch by your side."

"No, no; let me talk with you now, while I have reason, for there is a weight upon my brain that seems as though it would crush it. My blood is on fire, and if I but close my eyes, horrid phantoms appear before me, and utter reproaches for my past life."

"Strive to think of other things," I said; for I did not desire that Gracia should know the history of her past life.

"No; I cannot do so. The events of that dreadful night, when first we met, are now before me, and I see blood upon the floor. Ah, it is Antonio's blood, and it drips, drips, until a pool is formed, and in it I see my own face."

"Do not be alarmed," I said, in a whisper, to Gracia. "Heed nothing that she says, and some day I will explain all."

The lady bowed, and although she looked frightened, did not speak.

"We could pass as man and wife, and love each other as truly as if we were legally married," Isadora said, after a long pause. "And if I love you only," she continued, "you will marry me — will you not?"

She did not wait for an answer, but commenced laughing in an insane manner.

"Perhaps, senorita, it will be as well for you to occupy another state-room for the night," I said to Gracia. "You are fatigued, and need sleep. I can take care of Isadora, and will watch by her during her ravings."

"I will go if you desire my absence," the lady said, kindly. "But I feel no need of sleep, and would much prefer to stay with you, and assist in taking care of my friend."

"But you may hear things which I should rather you would not; at least until an explanation is made."

"I shall ask no questions," she said, "but if you are disposed to trust me with your confidence, I shall not abuse it."

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I could only thank her with a look, and then turned my attention to the invalid, who seemed to be resting a little easier. I left her for a moment, and went to the medicine chest for the purpose of getting something of a soothing nature, that would cause her to sleep. While I was thus occupied Murphy poked his head from his state-room.

"Well, how does she get along?" he asked.

"She is very sick," I said.

"But that is not the worst of it," he replied. "She will never get well. Mark my word on that pint. That woman has got the worst kind of coast fever, and she won't get over it. I've seen too much of it not to know."

"Can I do anything to relieve her?" I asked.

"Not a thing, unless you give her laudanum; and sometimes that makes 'em wild and fierce like. But doctoring ain't of any use now."

With that look in went his head, and his door closed. I confess that it was with dimmed eyes I sought for the laudanum, and emptied a dose in a tumbler with some water, and then returned to my patient. Gracia saw that I was agitated, and a look of pity showed itself upon her face. She assisted me to raise Isadora, and poured the stuff down her throat. The patient opened her eyes, and regarded me attentively for a moment.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Giving you a potion that will make you sleep," I replied.

"You are not poisoning me?" she demanded.

"The saints forbid. I love you too much for that."

"Do you love me as well as if I was your wife?" she asked, earnestly and distinctly.

"Hush, dear," I whispered; "we will talk of these things some other time."

"No; answer me now. Do you love me as well as if I was your wife, and a priest had said a prayer over us?"

"I do," I answered, most sincerely.

"Then I am satisfied;" and closing her eyes, she sank back upon a pillow, and seemed to doze for a while, but at length her breathing became regular, and she slept.

I looked at Gracia, but that young lady did not appear to have noticed our conversation.

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"Senorita," I said, softly, standing by her side, "did you hear the ravings of Isadora?"

"I will answer just as you wish," she replied.

"Then say that you heard all that passed, and an explanation would be agreeable."

"I am not a confessor," she answered; "but the gentleman who saved my life is entitled to much consideration, and if he speaks I will listen."

"And will you judge me fairly?" I asked.

"I shall not be a hard-hearted judge towards you, even if your faults are heavy, for you are young, and have time enough to repent."

I took her hand, and kissed it. She did not withdraw it, so I gained courage to proceed.

"I am fearful of offending your pure heart when I tell you that Isadora and myself are not married," I said, with a burning face.

"I know it," was the answer. "She told me as much, two days since."

"And you do not think the less of me for my sins?" I asked.

"I tell you I am not your judge; but as a lady, I will say that you have committed some faults."

"How can I thank you for this kindness?" I asked, with admiration for her friendship.

"By telling me your whole history while Isadora sleeps."

"And conceal nothing?" I asked.

"Nothing but what would be improper for a maiden to hear," she responded, with a gentle pressure of her hand.

I glanced towards Isadora, and saw that she was sleeping calmly under the effects of the opiate; and then I began to relate matters connected with my acquaintance with Isadora just as they had occurred, and did not attempt to shield myself in any respect. When I had concluded, I awaited her decision with a trembling heart.

"You have committed some wrongs in your life," she said, with a gentle smile, "but not enough to prevent your being forgiven. Most men, I suppose, have faults of some kind to answer for, and if they did not, they would no longer be men."

She smiled so sweetly upon me that I forgot Isadora, and

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everything excepting Gracia. I stole an arm around her waist, and gently pressed her to my heart; and as I did so heard a loud scream, and looking up saw that Isadora was regarding us with eyes which seemed glowing with fire.

CHAPTER IX.

A JEALOUS SICK WOMAN. — DEATH OF ISADORA. — CONSOLATION PROMISED BY GRACIA. — HOW MEN FORGET. — MURPHY AND HIS PLANS.

As Gracia caught sight of Isadora's face, so fierce and revengeful, she shrunk from my side, and would have left the state-room, but was too agitated to rise.

"Wretches!" Isadora cried, passion almost choking her utterance; "while I am dying you are embracing. Is this the love you swore you entertained for me, and which induced me to leave Cuba and follow you to this abominable spot upon the earth?"

"But listen to me for a moment, Isadora," I pleaded.

"I won't listen to you, traitor!" she cried, with increased passion. "You have betrayed me — you have abandoned my love for another's, and all the vows a man's heart is capable of uttering cannot make me think of you as I once did. If I had a knife, I would kill you and that soft, sentimental thing by your side."

"Those are wild expressions, Isadora," I said.

She did not reply, but, exhausted, regarded me attentively. Her eyes lost much of their fierceness, and I anticipated a reaction in her feelings in a short time — that is, if I went to work in a proper manner to produce it. I motioned to Gracia to leave the room for a moment, and the poor girl was glad enough to comply with my hint, and get beyond the reach of such insane denunciations.

"My dear girl," I said, attempting to take Isadora's hand, which was withdrawn quickly. "You were deceived in what you saw. We were watching by your side, and whispering respecting your speedy recovery."

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"But I saw your arm around her waist," Isadora said.

"You think that you did, but is it not possible that you might have been deceived? Look at me, and ask your heart the question."

Her hand no longer strayed from mine. She was fast recovering from her jealous fit, when Gracia entered the room to obtain a book which she had been reading. At the sight of one whom she supposed to be a rival in my affections, all of Isadora's bad nature returned. The blood rushed to her face, and her eyes flashed like diamonds. She started up, and would have spoken, but her words were checked by a rush of blood that gushed from her mouth, and spirted over the bed-clothes in torrents. She had ruptured a blood-vessel in her rage. She sank back upon her pillow with a groan, the blood still oozing from her mouth. Still her eyes were fixed upon me, even in that moment, as though she loved me, in spite of her denunciations. She even raised her hand and placed it upon mine, and pressed it slightly in token of forgiveness.

I was so much alarmed I did not know what to do, and I could only pass my hand under her head, and kiss her forehead most tenderly; for my strong love returned at that awful moment, and I would have given even my diamonds to have restored her to health. I turned to look for Gracia, but the poor girl had fled to the cabin in alarm, and I could hear her sob, undisturbed by Murphy's snoring, which was none of the slightest.

Isadora motioned for me to place my face close to her mouth, so that she could whisper to me. I complied with her request.

"Do you still love me?" she asked.

"I do," I replied.

"Then I die satisfied. Think of me sometimes, for, if I can live after death, as it is said that we can, I shall watch over you and assist you; but don't marry that —"

She ceased speaking, for blood again gushed from her mouth and choked her utterance. There was a slight struggle, and all was still. When I raised my head, she was dead. I wiped some stains from her face, beautiful in death, and then covered the remains with a clean sheet, and joined Gracia with a heart more sorrowful than I had ever known during my whole life.

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"My dear friend," she said, "I am the cause of this unhappiness, and terrible calamity. Can you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive," I said. "The poor girl's jealousy led her to suspect that I wronged her."

She did not reply, but her hand remained upon my arm, and her eyes were fixed upon the cabin floor.

"Let us," I said, taking her hand in mine, "mourn for her as sincerely as I should mourn for you. She was the first one I ever loved, and probably will be the last one who will ever love me;" and I was so overcome at the thought, that I was compelled to hide my face for a few moments.

"Did you love her very much?" Gracia asked, in a whisper.

"Very much," I replied. "I feel as though I should never love again."

"No one?" she asked, sorrowfully, still suffering her hand to remain in mine.

"No one," I replied, looking up. "At least," I continued, "no one unless you will at some future day have mercy on me, and call me a friend."

"And you think that would make you happy?" she asked.

"Nothing in the world will ever reconcile me to life but that," I answered, as I believed, most sincerely.

"It is too soon to talk on such matters," she said, after a moment's pause. "Yet let us be friends even now, for, indeed, I have much need of a sincere friend."

"And I shall be proud of the honor," I replied, most sincerely. "I ask for nothing more."

She gave me her hand, I kissed it, and then conducted her to the room where I had slept for the past week or ten days, and bade her good night with as much respect as if she had been a queen, and my life depended on her caprice.

I sat and watched by the side of Isadora until daylight, when I awoke Murphy.

"Well," he grunted; "what is it?"

"I have some bad news to communicate," I replied.

"Bad news? the devil! The Scorpion is not in sight—is she?" he asked, tumbling from his berth to the deck.

"No, not that. Isadora is dead."

"Thunder! She went suddenly, though—didn't she?"

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"Her death was unexpected," I replied.

"I wish that we could have known it yesterday. How we might have cheated old Cringy, and she wouldn't have been none the worse off, that I know of. Well, there's a good spec gone to the devil, and I ain't to blame for it, that I know of."

I remained silent. The captain opened his liquor case and helped himself to a strong glass of brandy, and handed the bottle to me. I declined it.

"Well, what are we going to do?" he asked, after a pause. "I don't s'pose that it would be fair to sell the girl, now that she's dead, and so cheat old Cringy — would it?"

I shook my head, too disgusted to speak.

"I'll tell you what we can do," the captain said, brightening up, and sinking his voice to a whisper; "there's the other girl; Cringy don't care which one he gets, if he only has a white wife."

"You know that I have opposed to this plan all along," I said.

"Do you dare to show signs of mutiny in my cabin?" the captain asked, pale with rage.

"If you force me to it, I shall answer yes," I replied. "Understand me distinctly. I rescued the lady from the ship, and was the means of bringing on board five boxes of gold. Without my advice no boat would have been sent. For this service I demand that the lady is placed under my care.

"Are you done?" he asked, purple with rage, and feeling nervously in his pockets, as though searching for a revolver.

"I am," I replied.

"Then just walk into that state-room, and remain till I tell you to come out. You're off duty, and you shall stay off till you ax my pardon, and know how to treat me like a gentleman."

"Then the world will have to end before I make such an acknowledgment," I answered.

"We shall see," was his answer. "You go in the state-room, and stay there till I call you out."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," I replied. "I shall go on deck and stay in the cabin as long as I please. I am off duty, and that is enough."

"I have a great mind to strangle you," he said, working his hard, knobby hands as he spoke, as though he could hardly refrain from attempting it.

"Let me know when you commence, for I shall want a share

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in that sport," I replied, insolently, and with an air of the utmost indifference.

For a few seconds we stood looking at each other, my hand upon my revolver, and it seemed as though he could not restrain his passion; but at length he mastered it, and walked out of the cabin and on deck.

The instant he was gone, I looked up and saw the beautiful but terrified face of Gracia.

"May the saints protect me, senor," she said, wringing her hands; "for I have heard all your conversation with that bad man, and what he proposes to do with me. O, save me from such a dreadful fate!"

"Do not be alarmed." I replied. "Before he shall carry his designs into effect I will kill him like a dog. Trust all to me."

"I do trust to you," she replied. "Honor and life are in your hands. Save me, and then demand your reward."

"I ask for no reward but your gratitude," I answered, kissing her hand, and thinking how very beautiful she was.

"My gratitude you have already. Save me, and you shall have my —"

She paused suddenly, and covered her agitated face with her hands.

"Dare I ask for your love at the proper time?" I said, putting an arm around her waist.

"Do you wish it?" she asked, looking up with her beautiful eyes in such a manner, that I felt life would be worthless without it.

"I love you as I never loved before," I replied, warmly. "With the promise of your hand, I could encounter a worse man than the captain, and come off victorious."

"Then take me to your arms and with me my whole heart, for I have loved you since the day you saved my life."

I had only time to bless and kiss her, when I heard the steward's steps entering the cabin, and with a confiding glance Gracia left me and retreated into her state-room.

"I hear, sir," the steward said, sinking his voice to a whisper, "that the old man has turned you off duty. How is that?"

"Well, I suppose that he has," I answered.

"But what for, sir? The men will want to know, you know."

"Then I'm afraid that they won't know — at least from me," I answered, in an indifferent manner.

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"But I know, sir," the steward cried, with a cunning look, and sinking his voice still lower, for fear the old man should overhear him. "I heard you and the cap'n talk about the money, and I heard you say that you wouldn't agree to cheat the men out of a cent. The men knows that, sir, and you won't have much trouble in getting 'em to stick by you."

"What should I require the men to stick by me for?" I asked, in apparent astonishment. "I am knocked off duty because I don't agree with the captain on certain points. Well, we can part, and he can get some other man to fill my place. That's all."

"It's the gold, I know, sir," the steward whispered. "Don't be afeard of me. I'm true as steel, but I ain't going to have no games come over me by the old man, no how you can fix it. And the crew won't nuther. Mark my word."

I made no reply, and the steward started to go on deck, but returned.

"You couldn't spare me a couple bottles of gin, could you, sir?" he asked. "I want it for a particular purpose."

I knew what he wanted it for, as well as though he had told me. I unlocked my liquor case and gave the bottles to him; he concealed them in his pantry, and then went on deck, where I soon followed him. I saw that old Cringy was pushing off from the shore in his canoe, and I expected that a bargain would be closed that moring with Murphy for Gracia, and I wondered how I should frustrate it.

"How does you all do dis berry fine mornin'?" Cringy asked, as he stepped on deck. "I s'pose dat de ladies was charmed wid de music last night. Ah, dat was berry fine, and all de niggers on shore mad 'cos I want white wifey. I no care for 'em, dough. I rich nigger and hab plenty ob slaves."

Murphy made no reply, but walked the deck in moody silence.

"What de matter wid you all dis morning?" Cringy asked. "You all look as dough you no eat your breakfast berry well. What de matter?"

"The matter is," replied Murphy, "that your cussed singing and howling last night frightened one of the women, and she is dead."

"But dare is one left, and she do for me," the old slave dealer replied; "I no want both. One 'spensive, and she do well as two. I take de one dat is left."

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He seemed to care no more for Isadora's sudden death than if she had been a slave.

"You know what we were talking about," Murphy said, speaking so that I could hear him, as though on purpose to annoy me.

"I doesn't 'zackly recollect," the darky said.

"Why, didn't you offer me a hundred black birds for either one of the women?" the captain demanded.

"I sartinly did," replied Cringy, with a hideous grin.

"Then I tell you that I accept, and that as soon as the niggers are on board the woman is yours."

"But I have a word to say against that," I remarked, to Cringy's intense surprise. "I claim her as my property, and no man shall sell her or offer her an insult as long as I live. Sooner than see her sold, I'll blow her brains out."

The old darky looked astonished, and no doubt he was.

"I am the master of this vessel," Murphy said, "and I shall do as I please. The woman is sold, and you can't help yourself. Now go down below, or I'll put you down. You fool! do you suppose I would have permitted a woman to come on board unless I intended to trade her off for niggers?"

He advanced towards me with a menacing look; but just at that moment I saw a movement of the crew, and that they were coming aft. Murphy saw them also, and paused.

"What in the devil's name do you want, you dog?" Murphy asked, fiercely.

"Fair words, Captain Murphy, if you please," one of the men named Sam, said. "We belong for'ard, I know; but we ain't slaves, and we can ask a question, I s'pose."

"Then ask it quick, and be off, or I'll be among you," was the captain's fierce rejoinder.

"You had better not try that to-day, 'cos it won't work," Sam cried, quite boldly; and I saw by his manner that the men would sustain him.

"Mr. Robert," the captain said, turning to me, and calling my name to attract immediate attention, "go into the cabin and bring out six pairs of handcuffs. I'll see if my men are to bully me on the quarter-deck."

"You forget that I am off duty," I said, quite calmly. "The quarrel does not concern me."

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"That's what we come arter," three or four of the men cried out. "We want to know what the mate's knocked off duty for."

"Ah, and we will know," Sam said.

The captain's rage knew no bounds, and he tore around the quarter-deck like a madman; I expected every moment when he would leap amid the men, and strike to the right and left like an enraged lion.

"Steward," he yelled, choking with passion, "bring me my revolver."

"No you don't," the men laughed in defiance. "The steward ain't going to do no such thing, now you had better believe us."

"Have you got your revolver in your pocket," Murphy asked, turning to me.

"I have," I answered.

"Lend it to me for a moment, and I'll be your friend for life," he gasped, his face red with passion, and his little eyes looking very wicked.

"Don't you do it, Mr. Robert," the men cried. "We ain't got nothing agin you."

I turned and walked towards the taffrail, for I saw that my only chance to save Gracia was to let the men work as they pleased.

"Well, men, what else do you want?" demanded Murphy, when he saw that I would not support him.

"We want the shiners which was found aboard of the Spaniard divided among us," was the cry.

"You can't have the money," was the captain's reply, shaking his huge fist at the men, and grinding his teeth with rage. "You shall pass over my body first."

"You thinks that you is going to keep 'em all to yerself — do you?" asked one of the crew, speaking sarcastically. "O, yes; that's the talk — is it? It's all right arter you get to Havana. We can't speak then — can we?"

"We don't know nothin', we don't," another one cried. "We don't hear you tell Mr. Robert that if he's all right, the men may go to the devil. O, no."

"Three cheers for Mr. Robert," cried the steward; and as the men were well charged with my rum, they couldn't do otherwise than compliment me.

The cheers were commenced, but hardly was the first one uttered, when Murphy sprang in the midst of the crew, and began striking to the right and left with his powerful arms.

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So sudden was his onset, that the men went back in confusion, as three or four of their number were knocked down, and fell heavily to the deck. At first I feared that the crew would leave the field, put to flight by one man; but they rallied and gathered round the captain, some receiving his blows, and some attempting to return them, and then all were mixed up in confusion, with utterings of groans and curses; yet the skipper still kept on his feet, and never ceased using his arms and striking as hard as he could, and when he did strike, the marks of his fist were visible.

At length I saw one of the men, a Spaniard named Antonio, leave the crowd covered with blood, and steal forward. He ran to the windlass, seized a handspike, again went aft, and once more mingled with the men. Presently I saw the handspike raised and fall, and it struck heavily; there was a crunching sound that made me set my teeth, as though they were on edge. The struggle ceased, and the men separated; and there on the deck was the body of Murphy, his garments in rags, his hair torn out by handfuls, and his face and neck all besmeared with blood.

"Lift the old feller up," one of the men said, at length, "and let's see if he's gone to Davy Jones's locker."

They lifted him up, but there was no sign of life.

"Won't you take a look at him, sir, if you please?" one of the men said, addressing me. "I guess he's a goner."

I approached the spot, and examined the body. There was a large gash upon the head, and the skull was crushed in, and the brains were visible and running out. I placed my hand upon his heart. Murphy was dead, and all the surgeons in the Massachusetts Hospital could not have brought him to life.

"Well, sir?" asked the men, crouching around me with anxious faces.

"He is dead," I said.

"But you noticed that we didn't hit him with anything but our fists. We didn't mean to kill him, sir," the men said.

"I should hope not," I remarked.

"We want you to take charge of the vessel, and run her to some port in Cuba, where we can land, and no questions asked. That's what we want you to do," the men continued.

That was what I wanted to do, but I didn't say so, for I had no desire to incur their suspicions.

"Perhaps it would be better for me to leave here," I continued.

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"You can then choose your captain, and do as you please. If I take charge of the vessel, you know me well enough to know that I won't give an order twice. I will be obeyed."

"And we'll obey. Tell us to do a thing, and we'll do it. Let the man who refuses do so at his peril," was the cry.

"Do you solemnly pledge yourselves to this?" I asked.

"We do," was the response.

"Then I will take command of the vessel, and must be obeyed as commander. Remove the body, and put it on the main hatch, and cover it over with a piece of canvass."

It was done in silence, and the blood washed from the deck.

I went below and had an interview with Gracia, whose eyes still showed traces of tears, and her face of the agitation under which she labored.

"I have been frightened nearly to death," she said, putting her hands upon my arm, and speaking very slowly. "What have you been doing? I heard a noise and loud talking."

"The men have had trouble with the captain, and it ended seriously," I replied.

"When shall I hear the end of these disturbances?" she asked, covering her eyes with her hands, and sinking upon the lounge in the cabin.

"Before many days," I replied. "It was necessary that something should be done to save you, for the captain was determined to accept of Cringy's offer, and sell you for a hundred negroes."

"I would have strangled myself before I would have submitted to such a fate," she answered, with spirit.

"And with such a feeling you can no longer regret that he is dead?" I asked.

"If it was necessary for my safety, I do not," she answered, after a moment's pause.

"I hope that you will find me as attentive to your comfort as the late master," I said, with a smile.

She laid her head upon my shoulder, and I smoothed her soft black hair, and knew by the looks of her eyes that she trusted me and believed in me. We talked for some time, and when I left her she had promised me that her hand should be mine as soon as a minister could be found to perform the ceremony, and until then I swore I would wait; but thought as I went on deck more of the promise than of taking on board a cargo of

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slaves, and studied how I should make the crew believe as I did. The men were on the forecastle, smoking and talking over the late proceedings, when I called them aft. They came quite readily.

"Now, lads," I said, "we have got some work to do before we can call ourselves safe. You know that the Scorpion and the Serpent are on the station, and that they owe us no good will. If they should run in here, we should be taken and condemned without a hearing, and every one of us imprisoned for years. We don't want this to happen, for we have plenty of shots in the locker, and we wish a chance to use them — don't we?"

"In course we does," was the exclamation of the men; and visions of rum and tobacco floated before them as they thought of the shore.

"Now, suppose we should ship a light freight of slaves, and be off as quick as we can? We can take just enough to pay expenses, and satisfy the owners, and that is all we care about."

"That's the talk," was the cry. "We don't want to stow six or seven hundred aboard, and get the fever, and all that sort of thing. What we want is fun."

"Then let us go to work in earnest, and in two days we can be ready to sail for Cuba. I can get three hundred negroes from Cringy on fair terms, and have them delivered on time. That's better than waiting for five hundred," I said.

The men agreed that it was, with two exceptions. The second mate and Sam did not seem to approve of the matter; and I readily guessed the reason why the former did not feel comfortable. I said nothing, however, to let him understand that I was watching him.

"We must get that sickening sight out of the way before many hours," I said, pointing to the body of the captain. "Four of you will take a boat and go on shore with shovels, and dig two graves on the bluff that overlooks the ocean, and when you have concluded, we will bury our dead."

But the men had a most superstitious dread of grave-digging, and begged most humbly to be let off from such work; and at length I consented to hire a party of Cringy's men to do the business, and sent the second mate on shore to see that it was done well. I did not dare to leave the vessel, for I feared to trust Gracia without my protection. I saw that the mate selected Sam as a companion to help him, and I did not like their appearance

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as they passed over the side. I determined to watch their movements closely, and then set the carpenter to work to make a couple of coffins, but had forgot the movements of the mate and Sam, when the steward gave me a hint that he would like to speak with me in the cabin. I followed him in, and with an air of great secrecy, he whispered, —

"Cap'n, that second mate and Sam are rascals, and you should know it. I tell you that they is, 'cos I know 'em."

I did not say that I suspected as much, for I wanted to see what proof he had of his assertion.

"Why do you think so?" I asked, after a short examination of the fellow's face, to see if he was playing false, or acting honest.

"'Cos, sir, I seed 'em talking together ever so much, and I don't think that the mate likes it, 'cos he can't have the gal."

"Why, what has he said about her?" I inquired, in a careless way; for I did not wish to show how much I was moved by the information.

"I heard him tell Sam that he thinks it hard if you must have all the women, and he go without. He said he didn't like that 'ere kind of work, no how you could fix it; and that to make things all shipshape he should have had her, and he would make an honest woman of her when we reached port."

"Sets the wind in that quarter, my friend?" I asked myself. "Then we shall have to look after you a little, and see that you don't carry your thoughts into execution."

"And what did Sam say to that?" I enquired of the steward.

"He said if the word was passed, it would find him alow or aloft at any time. That he stuck to friends, and had rather take a little cruise in search of fun than go into port just at the present time."

"Which means, steward, that he would take to piracy as readily as to running slaves."

"I can't go that, sir," the steward answered, with an uncomfortable feeling about his neck. "I can stand caging a few hundred 'blackbirds,' 'cos it's for their good, but I can't go the piracy. It's a hanging matter, you know, if you get caught; and in this business it's only a few month's imprisonment, and lots of chances. Besides, what does the second mate know of navigation, I should like to know."

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"He knows nothing about it," I replied; "and you must impress this upon the men, and let me know if there are others who wish to join him. He wants to get you all hanged, I believe, but I shall try and save you."

The steward promised to comply with my request, and left me to go forward amongst the men and perform his mission, while I paid a visit to poor Isadora, and with my own hands cleaned the blood from her face, and put upon the body such garments as I thought most suitable. She had not altered in the least, but looked so mild and lovely that I was almost excited to tears as I thought of her sudden and terrible death, and blamed myself much for the part I took in causing it.

My heart, in those days, was not the kind of heart which I have at the present time. It was a bold, and I might say bad heart, unpurified by religion, and a knowledge of its blessings and happiness.

After the second mate and Sam had returned, and reported that the graves had been dug in a proper manner, I made a signal for Cringy to come on board, and that worthy lost no time in doing so. He looked a little suspicious when he reached the deck, but seeing that all was quiet, gained confidence, and was as obsequious to me as he had been to Murphy the day before.

"Cringy," I said, giving the old fellow a cigar, which he looked upon as a rare treat, "we want three hundred slaves on board by to-morrow night. Can you supply them?"

"Dat berry soon," he said, shaking his grizzly head in doubt. "I don't know vhere I get 'em."

"Come, I don't believe that, you know; you have got the black birds in cage, and you must let them out to-morrow, or I shall sail without a cargo. You have got stuff enough on shore, which we left the last trip, to pay for three hundred, and you know it."

"No, no; so help me God, I don't dink dat dare is. De markets all fall short."

"I know better than that, for here is a paper whereby you have admitted the receipt of so many goods, and you won't deny it, I know."

I had found among the papers of Murphy a large number of receipts from Cringy, where he had acknowledged receiving our first cargo, and had given us credit for the same. This was sometimes necessary on account of not having an opportunity to land and receive cargo, cruisers being in the neighborhood.

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Cringy, when he saw the paper, did not deny that he had affixed his mark to it, and his mark looked like a skillet, with an extraordinary long handle. Still he was not certain that he could supply the slaves that had been agreed upon at such low prices, as he should lose by the operation. The old scamp was resolved to cheat me if possible, but I was equally as resolved that he should not.

"By the way, Cringy," I said, during our discussion, "the king sent a canoe down the river last night."

"Ah, what dat for?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Merely for me to come and see him, and go on a slave hunt," I replied, indifferently.

"Ah, me no know dat," he said, anxiously.

"No, the messenger was told not to stop for a moment, and not to speak to any one but me. I sent a few gallons of rum to the king, and word that if I didn't get the slaves on board to-morrow, I would come and see him, and stay a few days."

I was telling a falsehood, but I managed not to let Cringy suspect it, and he didn't, for after looking at me for a moment with his sharp eyes, all screwed up, he said, —

"You no go dar. De niggers be on board to-morrow."

"Good healthy ones I want. No fever, no sores, no sulky slaves," I said.

Cringy squirmed a little, and didn't look elated.

"If you do as I request you to, I will make you a handsome present before I sail," I said.

His face brightened instantly, and he promised.

"I have a favor to ask of you by and by," I continued, "and I shall pay you well for performing it."

"What you want?" he asked. "S'pose you want one of my wives; you can have her."

I didn't want one of his wives, but he was curious as a monkey to learn what I did want; but I was not prepared to tell him just then, for I feared that he might reveal the secret confided to him.

"Now send your darkies on board, and let them get our water casks. They must be filled and stowed before dark," I said.

Cringy promised, and left me to get ready to follow to the grave the remains of Isadora and Murphy. I had two boats manned, and put one coffin in each boat; and then fearful of leaving Gracia on board in company of the second mate, I took her with me, and also found room for Sam at one of the oars, for I had no inten-

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tion of leaving him and the second mate to do a little plotting while I was absent. I thought from their looks that they were slightly disappointed at my action.

The natives pressed forward to offer assistance when the coffins were removed from the boats, and even old Cringy was there to volunteer his aid.

"Pleased to see de live leedy here on dese shores," Cringy said. "She is de fust leedy dat cum here for many months."

I gave the signal to start, and the funeral cortege moved on its way, followed by the Coquette's crew, and after them the whole population of the village, children and dogs included. The youngsters seemed to think that the occasion was one for great rejoicing, and they were before us and behind us, between our legs and on each side, and uttered shrill yells when they thought that we needed encouragement to plod our way through the sand, under a burning sun.

"Have you no fear of trusting yourself with these savages?" Gracia asked, as we walked in procession, with grinning, stalwart natives by the side of us, all eager for a view of her sweet face.

"There is not the least danger," I said. "The natives make their living, such as it is, from slavers, and they know that any act of treachery on their part, would be repaid with cost. We are much more safe than if belonging to a fifty gun frigate."

After considerable toil we reached the bluff where the graves were dug, while the sailors formed a square around them for the purpose of keeping the natives back, and allowing the interments to proceed without confusion. We lowered the coffins into the graves, and I read a prayer from a book which I happened to find on board, although how it came there was never satisfactorily accounted for. The services pleased the sailors, for whether they bury the dead at sea or on shore, they want no half way work, but the full ceremony. They stood with uncovered heads while reading the prayers, and then the earth was thrown in, and Isadora and I were parted for this world.

I gave the signal to the men to return to the beach, for I wanted to spend a few minutes in company with Gracia, near the grave of one whom I had loved so well. The men rolled off towards the town, but the natives, or a part of them, still lingered, as though some other forms were to be observed.

"Cringy," I said, calling the old fellow to me, "can't you get rid of these blacks? I want to be alone for a few minutes."

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"Golly, can't I?" he exclaimed; and he adopted a very novel method of doing it, and one which I should have supposed would have elicited retaliation. He caught up handfuls of sand, and hurled it into the faces of those nearest to him, and continued to do so until they started towards the village, all the time scolding like an insane man, and filling the air with gravel.

Gracia was much amused at this method of dispersing a crowd. I was glad to see her smile, and told her so.

"Dar, what you dink of dat?" Cringy asked, coming back somewhat out of breath, with the perspiration standing on his forehead like big black beads.

I told him that I thought the expedient was a novel one, and he chuckled at it.

"Ah, dare's nothin' like kickin' a nigger's shins, or drowin' dust in his eyes, when he no want move. Dem dings fix niggers, and bring 'em to reason."

Desiring to remain by the grave of Isadora for a short time longer, I told old Cringy that if he would go to his house and make arrangements for our reception, we would follow him in a little while; and the old fellow was good enough to take the hint and leave us, wending his way down the hill like a huge flamingo that had been shot at by some poor marksman, and wounded in the legs.

For some moments we stood looking upon the ocean without speaking. Gracia's head reposed upon my shoulder, and my arm was tight around her waist.

"I have been thinking," Gracia said, "who I should have loved, if I had never met you."

I didn't like the idea of her even alluding to such a subject, and think that she guessed as much from my looks, for she sighed and patted my cheek as though I had been a child.

"Why, what a jealous man you are!" she exclaimed, "you don't want me even to speak of any man excepting yourself, when you know I love only you, and that I should die without you. I have had cavaliers sighing at my feet for the last two years, but I laughed at the pains which they said I inflicted, and now I wonder if I should have been married at all if I had not met you. It don't seem as though I should."

I kissed her, and pressed her close to my side, and folded my arms around her.

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"Perhaps, Gracia," I said, "your father will not consent that we should be united after we return to Cuba."

"But if I tell him that you have been so kind to me, and have protected me from injury, I think that he will," she said, most hopefully.

"He may say that he is rich, very rich, and that I am poor in comparison, and no match for his daughter."

"Then you can tell him that you are a gentleman, and that what you did for me rendered you noble," Gracia said, speaking very low.

"I should tell him, dear," I replied, "that I did not want his gold, and that it was insulting to expect it in such a case as this; and then I should kiss your hand, and remember you through life, as one I had loved better than life itself."

"And leave me?" she asked.

"What other course could I pursue?" I asked.

"Why, fifty," she answered, cheerfully. "In the first place you would know that you possessed my love, and I am sure that should weigh much in your estimation."

I smiled, and kissed her most tenderly.

"In the next place," she continued, "there are such things as elopements, and secret marriages; and if you should say to me, 'I have tried all honorable methods of winning your hand and not succeeded, now what shall I do next?'"

"And what would be your answer?" I asked, with much interest.

"'Why, you tiresome creature,' I should say; 'take me with my own consent, even if you can't get my father's.' Does tha satisfy you?"

I could only answer with such kisses, that her lips must have suffered terribly in the contest. She blushed, and tried to restrain my ardor, but was not at all offended by the course which I pursued.

"Now, you silly creature, are you perfectly satisfied?" Gracia asked, after a moment's pause, during which we looked upon the ocean, and thought of the happiness that awaited us.

"I should be more satisfied if we were married, darling," I said; "but until we are I must remain content, I suppose. If a priest was within a hundred miles of us I would go in search of him."

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"And leave me?" she asked.

"By no means. I should take you with me."

"For what?" she inquired, with a smile.

"For the purpose of marrying you," I said.

"Are you as anxious as that to call me wife?" she asked, softly.

I sighed, and pressed her closer to my bosom.

"Here," she said, suddenly, "kneel upon the grave of Isadora, and swear that you will never desert me, and will always love me, and will marry me upon the first opportunity. Swear by the saints and by the God which we both worship that you will do so."

I knelt down, and swore to do what she had repeated, and I meant what I said.

"Now," she whispered, "I am as much your wife as if the bishop of Havana had united us. Take me to your heart, and always keep me there."

With her head closely nestled upon my breast, we stood and looked upon the ocean in silence. One of her hands was closely locked in mine, and my left arm thrown around the most perfect formed waist that the world could produce. How long we should have stood there I cannot say, but were disturbed by seeing Cringy appear at the foot of the bluff, minus his cocked hat, and beckon me to come down from my point of observation, as though in his estimation we had staid there long enough.

"What does that old monster want now?" Gracia asked, rather pettishly, I thought, for we were very comfortable and happy where we stood.

"I suppose he wishes to announce that his wives are ready and willing to receive us," I replied.

We walked along down the bluff and joined Cringy, who looked radiant with happiness.

"My wives say dat she come in, and glad to see her. No jealous of dis nigger, as I s'pose dey would be. Come and see de hansomest niggers dat can be found in dis town."

We followed the old man into his house, and were received by an array of infants without clothing, and three stout negro wenches, with brass and gold trinkets upon their arms, ankles, and pendants from their ears, so that they looked overloaded and misshapen. The women were fat and oily, with strips of white cotton cloth around their persons, yet sufficiently loose to allow

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the air to circulate between the cloth and skin, and cool their forms.

Cringy's wives eyed Gracia with considerable curiosity, and evidently commented on her style of beauty, all three of them trying to talk at the same moment; and in this respect I hinted to my intended wife that they resembled their sisters of more civilized countries; but Gracia retorted, by saying, "Men never talk?" and that silenced me completely.

Cringy brought in baskets of freshly picked fruit, and his wives were anxious that we should refresh ourselves. The old fellow also came out nobly in the way of wine; for he had several bottles of claret he had obtained from a French ship several months before, and did us the honor of offering us some; but I observed his wives did not partake of the wine, but reserved their appetites for something which smelt to me like Medford rum, and I rather think that it was, for we had landed several casks on our first visit to the river, several months before.

I left Gracia and the wives eating fruit, while I lighted a cigar and strolled out with Cringy to talk about business.

"Cringy," I said, "I suppose you will do most anything for money."

"Only try me," he grinned, and wagged his head.

"Would you like to make a hundred dollars?" I asked.

"O, golly, you jist try me;" and the old darky eyed me with a cunning look, as though he knew I had some work for him which I could not do myself.

"Cringy," I said, "you saw the manner in which the men killed Murphy?"

He nodded his head.

"Well, I think it is prudent to leave two or three of them on shore when I sail."

"Dat berry proper," he answered.

"Now I want you to help me keep them on shore after I have got them here, and for your work you shall have one hundred dollars. But you must keep my secret, and never reveal it."

"Me understand," he said.

"After they have been on shore for a few minutes, you must hoist a signal that a man-of-war is in sight, and then leave the rest to me."

"But s'pose no man-of-war in sight?" he asked.

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"Still I want the signal hoisted, and I wish you to find an excuse to send the men, when on shore, some distance from the village."

"I see, I see," the old man grunted, rubbing his hands with glee; and this was all the conversation that took place, for I knew his cupidity would not let him rest until the hundred dollars were safe in his pocket.

We rejoined the wives and my sweet Gracia, who was eating a banana and sipping claret with a most fascinating air, while the wives were drinking Medford and eating oranges as though they cost but little trouble to their husband to collect. In consequence of this agreeable occupation, the faces of the wives were a striking sight, yellow being beautifully blended with black. The fruit and the rum were having their effect, for black eyes were rolling most wonderfully, and tongues had broken loose without regard to order. All three of the wives were talking at once, and dreadful work they made of it.

"De debil!" muttered Cringy, with a look of the most abject sorrow. "I jist cussed fool 'nough to go out and leave de rum bottle in der hands, and now I no get it agin."

His prophecy was quite true, for he made one attempt, when he thought his wives were not looking. He missed the bottle, but was struck over his head a blow that made him see quite a number of stars. He attempted to use the authority that is generally supposed to belong to the master of a house; but the attempt was a sad failure, and he was punished for his presumption.

I can't say that Gracia was really sorry for the old man's treatment, for, after the first alarm had subsided, she was inclined to smile to see Cringy attempt to protect his head and face; and when the wives had conquered, and beaten the husband from the house, she fairly laughed outright, as though the joke was too intense to keep quiet.

A little later Gracia and I sauntered along to the beach, arm-in-arm, talking on the way of what we had seen, and the significant share of negro married life exhibited after a few drinks of old Medford. The men touched their hats respectfully as we drew near.

"Where are the rest of the crew?" I asked.

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"They have taken a run into the town, sir," one of the men said.

I glanced over the group, and saw that the second mate, Sam, and one other were absent; but I cared not, for I preferred they should be on land instead of exciting discontent on board. I secretly hoped that they would remain on shore all night, for I had my plans laid for their welfare, which I hoped would not fail. I carefully lifted Gracia into the boat and we shoved off, the crowd of little niggers on the shore uttering a loud yell as we left them to their nakedness and sand. I found everything on board the Coquette all right. Supper was awaiting us in the cabin, and while Gracia stepped into her state-room to adjust her toilet, I had a few words with the steward, in a confidential manner.

"Is there anything new?" I asked.

"Only that the second mate, Sam, and Bill declare that they won't leave port 'till they gets satisfaction," was the answer.

"What kind of satisfaction?" I asked.

"They say that they will have women as well as you, or they'll know the reason why."

I made no reply, but I was thoughtful when Gracia joined me, and it seemed to me that I could make my thoughts assume a definite shape. I had a contest before me, and I wanted to win for Gracia's sake, for I knew what would be her fate if I should fail.

"You are thoughtful," she said, after the steward left the cabin, to attend to some duty in the galley. "Let me, who is soon to share your fate, also share your thoughts."

"My thoughts, darling, are of you, and I am sure I cannot be better employed than thinking of your happiness."

"Yes, but you seemed worried and restless. Is there any more danger, or do you anticipate any? These men are rough and fierce-looking, and your arm cannot contend against them all, if disposed for evil. O, if we were in some civilized country, how happy we could be!"

"It is for that I am striving," I whispered, folding her in my arms. "We must have patience, dear, and move with the current, and not try to stem it at present. Your beauty has occasioned some mischief, but I hope to overcome it."

Gracia looked as though she would readily dispense with her beauty for the present, but I did not feel so, and cherished it more for the danger it brought upon me.

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The night passed off quietly, and with morning canoes came alongside with the slaves, which had been purchased up the river by Cringy. As our cargo was limited, we gave the negroes more space than on our first voyage; although, when I looked down upon the sea of dark woolly heads, I could not help confessing that they were in rather close quarters, and seemed very wretched, although mute as if born dumb.

CHAPTER X.

AN ESCAPED SLAVE AND A CHASE. — A FREEMAN. — A SPECK OF MUTINY. — OFF FOR CUBA, ETC.

We were at breakfast when I heard a commotion on deck, and hastily making an excuse to Gracia, left the cabin, not knowing how to account for the noise.

"What is the trouble?" I asked of the steward, who was standing near the break of the quarter-deck.

"One of the niggers has got clear and jumped overboard, sir, and he's swimming for the shore like the devil," was the answer.

I heard a loud shout, and hastened to look over the rail upon the scene of operations. In one of Cringy's canoes were two of his slaves, or servants, in full chase after a brawny negro, who had escaped from one of the large boats alongside, which had transported the slaves from the river. The fellow was a splendid swimmer, and I hoped he would escape as a reward for his boldness. Yet I did not see how it was possible for him to elude his enemies, who were not only on the shore, but mustered on the water also, and were shouting as eagerly as though on a tiger hunt, and the animal was brought to bay. I called to Gracia to come on deck and witness the sight, and in a few seconds we were both watching the chase with much anxiety.

The swimmer had struck out for the shore, until he saw that the shouts of those on the water had drawn a crowd of negroes to the beach, and that capture was certain if he landed; when he turned, and swam in the direction of the land which formed the

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entrance to the harbor, and where a bar made out, and the surf was breaking wildly.

When he turned, those in the canoe were close upon him, and one fellow was standing in the bow with a paddle upraised to strike the swimmer upon that portion of his body where he would have felt it least, viz., his head, guarded as it was by thick curly hair, — for the man was of the Pangwe tribe, noted for thick skulls and luxuriant wool; but the negro was quick with his eyes as he was with his arms, and just as the paddle was descending he dove, and the weapon fell upon the water with such force that the holder pitched head first from the canoe, and nearly overturned and swamped it.

"Bravo!" cried Gracia, clapping her little hands with great glee, and laughing most heartily.

The crew took their tone from the quarter-deck, and, seeing that the lady was pleased with the incident, did not scruple to show that they were also gratified; and a loud shout and cries of encouragement were uttered in favor of the swimmer.

The negro who had tumbled overboard, scrambled into the canoe; but by this time the fugitive was some twenty fathoms off, swimming with lusty strokes for the land where no huts or natives were to be seen. If he could gain the land at that point, there was a slight prospect of his escape, provided his strength should last long enough to enable him to take to the bush and keep clear of the scouting parties which would be sent out. There was one chance in a hundred for him, and I hoped that he would gain it.

The canoe once more started in pursuit, and gained rapidly on the slave, who saw his danger; for he cast anxious glances over his shoulder every few seconds, but still swam towards the point, which was half a mile distant, as though he hoped to reach it before being run down. But the contest was unequal; although the canoe was a large one, and required eight or ten negroes to man it properly, and in the hands of only two men moved rather slowly. Once more the canoe was close upon the slave, and again did the negro who was in the bow raise his paddle and prepare for a mighty blow; but before it could descend, the swimmer sunk as suddenly as though an anchor was attached to his legs. The negro looked around to see where he would rise, so

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as to recommence the chase the instant his woolly head appeared on the surface of the water.

Gracia again clapped her hands in triumph, and the men shouted forth strong expressions of their delight.

There were two or three canoes alongside belonging to Cringy, and his people started to go to the assistance of their comrades; but Gracia implored me so earnestly to stop them, and give the slave fair play, that I interfered.

"Three or four of you jump into those canoes, and keep them from shoving off," I said; and I had not more than uttered the words before the men tumbled over the rail, and astonished the negro boatmen by signs not to be mistaken, that if they lifted a paddle they would get their heads punched in a very short time.

In the mean time the slave had risen to the surface some few fathoms from the canoe, having swam while under water. The instant the boatmen caught sight of the swimmer they uttered their village war cry, which sounded like "*ka-ka*," the last syllable being drawn out, or prolonged, until their breath was exhausted, or another respiration was required.

The two Africans in the canoe were determined that the swimmer should not reach the land at any rate; and, after giving one more blow with the paddle, and missing as a matter of course, they urged their craft towards the shore, calculating as near as possible where the slave would be likely to rise, so that his retreat would be cut off. From the schooner we saw the design, and the men howled their indignation, and shook their brawny fists. The townspeople danced with joy, and Gracia prayed to the saints with a rapidity that could only be equalled by a French woman.

The slave arose, and was received with a flourish of two paddles instead of one. He had but time to sink when the canoe men again moved farther in shore, and stood with paddles in hand ready to strike. The slave was under water such a long time, that I feared he had descended to the bottom, and, like an otter, was determined to die clinging to the kelp. Even Gracia left off reciting prayers, and asked me where he was. But as I was unable to give her a satisfactory answer, had to endure some slight sarcasm for my ignorance; which I thought at the

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time, and at the present period, was unjust, considering the relation which we sustained towards each other.

The swimmer rose, and to my surprise and the consternation of the natives on shore, he had turned from his course, and was striking out rapidly for the schooner; and, what was more, he had made such good use of his time under water that the canoe was eight or ten fathoms from him. I could see the slave inhale air as though his lungs were much in need of it, and strike out for the vessel with renewed vigor. His enemies uttered a shout, and started in pursuit; and this time I could see that they meant business, for one of them picked up a long spear, which they usually carried in the canoes, and was about to take aim. I shouted, in excellent English,—

"Stop that, you scamp!"

As the native did not know what I said, the effect upon him was rather startling, and perhaps more striking than if he had, for he dropped his weapon, and looked towards the vessel as though asking for further information. He saw about twenty-five men shaking twenty-five fists at him, and this was something not to be disregarded. The canoeman dropped his spear and took to his paddle, and the result was such a triumph that the crew uttered a shout of joy.

The swimmer by this time had rested, and was striking out again most vigorously for the Coquette. He seemed to entertain an idea that we were friendly towards him, for he answered our shout with a yell, and swam until he saw that the paddle was again flourished over his head, when he sank, and the canoe passed on.

"O, he is *muy bueno*," cried my friend Gracia, with such a clapping of hands that the slaves in the canoes alongside looked up in astonishment at such unusual sounds; and no doubt they would have smiled if they had not feared that such liberty would cost them a few blows at the hands of their overseers.

"Can you swim like that?" demanded Gracia of me.

Now a woman likes to suppose that her lover can do anything; because, as a general thing, she entertains an idea that he is not quite human in some respects. So, not to disappoint my darling, I smile, and say that I can swim some, I think, and that I rather prefer the water, if I have a long journey to make, to the land. She is satisfied, and once more turns her attention to the slave,

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who has just risen, and is looking over his shoulder as though expecting a vigorous blow with the paddle, which he has heard the sound of so often.

"Blast yer eyes, let the feller alone, can't yer?" yelled one of my men, addressing the canoemen. "If yer want a fair fight," he continued, "just let 'em come on deck or go on the land, and then you can have it out like men. But two on one ain't the thing."

The canoemen cared but little for the remark, and would have continued the chase, if they had not been brought to a sense of their position by seeing yams and potatoes, and several other kinds of vegetables flying around their heads; and I am happy to add that many of the yams struck the natives, and perhaps caused some little pain, for they uttered a howl, and looked towards the schooner instead of the swimmer; and after they once looked our way they were compelled to continue to do so, for every man on deck sent forth specimens of potatoes and yams, as though they were engaged in business, and wanted to get rid of the stock on hand in short order. What made the matter more interesting was the fact that the men aimed very well, and the canoemen were kept in a continual state of dodging until the swimmer reached the side of the vessel, and was assisted up by the sailors who were alongside.

"Where will you have him, sir?" the crew asked, looking at me.

I cast a look at the slave, and saw that he was a noble specimen of his race, tall and well-formed, with muscles which looked as though they had been tried in many a combat. The fellow glanced at me as though he would ask for my interposition in his behalf, and I resolved to grant it.

"Pass him on deck," I said.

"Just as he is, sir?" asked the men.

No, that would not do; for Gracia was by my side, and the slave was rather destitute of clothing, as in fact most of them were. I signified that a shirt and pair of trowsers would improve his appearance somewhat before his presentation on the quarter-deck; and the men understood the hint, and soon rigged him out with a red flannel shirt and a pair of white pants. The negro appeared very much astonished at finding his limbs encased in such articles, for it was the first time, most probably, that he

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had ever worn them during his life. He looked at the clothes and felt of them, and stretched his legs and arms, and hardly dared venture upon a movement of his feet, until the crew passed him up the gangway and over the rail. Then they pointed his face aft, and he came towards me with his head bowed, and his arms folded upon his breast, as though desirous of expressing his submission to me; yet there was nothing cowardly in his motions, nor any tremor that showed he was fearful of his fate, whatever it might be.

He stopped when within a few paces of me, and remained silent, with his head bowed upon his breast, and his eyes cast towards the deck, as though awaiting sentence. Gracia was delighted with his appearance, and murmured that he looked very romantic, and that he would make an excellent servant if he was tamed and properly trained to his duties. The slave was totally unaware of the interest he excited in her gentle heart, and did not even raise his eyes when she spoke.

"Why don't you speak to him, Robert?" my darling said. "Don't you see that he is expecting you to say something?"

I knew that he was, but I respectfully suggested to the lady that it would be of but little use to me to address the slave in English or Spanish. But while speaking the men cried out that "Cringy was coming alongside," and that he could talk most any of the lingo. In fact, Cringy's men had informed him that a slave had escaped, and he had hurried on board to see how much he was out of pocket by such an unexpected proceeding.

"Ask the slave, Cringy, which he had rather do, remain on board of the vessel and be my servant, or start for his tribe and run the risk of never reaching it?"

Cringy delivered the message, or said that he did, and for a few seconds the slave was silent and thought of the matter. He looked at his companions, who were being passed over the gangway and down into the hold, and then his eyes wandered to the land, where the trees were waving their branches as though beckoning him to come to them and enjoy freedom. I was not surprised at his decision after that long glance. His heart still beat for his native hearth, and his home and friends.

"He say dat he go," said Cringy; and the old man grinned at the idea.

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"Then go he shall. I will buy him; but you shall swear by your god, Ombruiri, that you will not seek to detain him when he wants to leave, and that you will let no one molest him after he has started."

"I no help meself. S'pose bad niggers bodder him, I no 'sponsible — am I?"

"Yes; you shall swear that you will send no one after the slave, or parties to ambush him."

"Dat right. I swear 'em," Cringy said, after a moment's thought.

I told him to interpret what I had said to the slave, and he did so. The man's face lighted up with an expression of joy, and before we could comprehend his intentions, he had thrown himself upon his knees at my feet, and was making odd signs of his gratitude. I motioned to him to arise, and then pointed to the shore. He understood me, and signified he was ready that instant to start upon his long journey. But I was determined that he should not leave us unprepared. I therefore made Cringy give him a spear, and I added a hatchet and a knife, besides a few pounds of bread, and a lot of fruit which we had on board. Thus loaded down, the slave was placed in a canoe, and paddled to a point of land farthest from the village, and set on shore. I watched him, and saw that he waved his hand towards the vessel as though to thank us for our kindness, and then disappeared amidst the underbrush and trees.

By the time the slaves were all on board and secured, the second mate and the two men came off. They had been drinking, I knew, and were inclined to be swaggering and mutinous. I said nothing to them, waiting to see how matters would turn, and soon found out. I feared a scene, and therefore sent Gracia into the cabin, yet without communicating to her my apprehensions. No sooner had she left the deck than the second mate and his companions came rolling towards me.

"Look a-here, Mr. Robert, we jest want a leetle settlement afore matters has gone any further," the second mate said, with most amazing assurance; and his companions urged him to "pitch in and win," as though they were ready to go any lengths in his support.

I could have shot all three of them where they stood, but I did not wish to stain my hands with their blood if I could help it.

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Many placed in my position would have done so, but I preferred another course.

"Indeed! What settlement do you allude to?" I asked, after a moment's pause, so that I should be sure and command my temper.

"You know as well as I does, that I ain't been treated right aboard of this schooner, and that I don't stand it any longer," the mate said, indignantly.

"In what respect?" I asked.

"Why, in the way of women, and you know it. Hain't you got 'em all, and don't give us a show? Didn't I speak for the one aboard, and I ain't got her? Blast my eyes if I stand such nonsense any longer. I'm going to have my share, or I'll know the reason why."

"And I'll tell you the reason why," I replied; for I saw that the men were crowding aft to hear the conversation, and knew it would take but little to make them explode like gunpowder. "The reason why is, because I am determined to look after the interest of the whole crew, and not take particular care of two or three, as Murphy was disposed to do. If the lady who is now on board is restored to her father uninjured, he will probably make us a present of ten or twenty thousand dollars, and the money will be divided among you. If she is misused, we will gain a powerful man's enmity, and make a losing voyage of it. This is the reason why you can't have her, or can't insult her."

"That is the talk," shouted all the men, with the exception of the mate and his friends. They looked a little alarmed for the success of their scheme, and were disposed to tack ship; but still the mate wanted a wife, and seemed determined to have one.

"I don't sail another mile in this 'ere bloody hooker till I has a wife as well as other folks," he muttered.

"Well, I have no objections to that," I replied. "Go on shore and buy a slave, and bring her on board. I don't want to find fault with you for your likes and dislikes. It is but a short trip to Havana, and there we can part."

The man grumbled, and looked irresolute. I continued to urge him on.

"Cringy," I said, turning to the old fellow, who was listening with much interest to the conversation, "haven't you got a good-looking female slave whom you can sell cheap?"

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I gave the old darky such a look that he understood me at once.

"Why, bress de Lord, if I hasn't got three of de puttiest gals dat white man ebber seed. I sell 'em cheap to white sailor."

"Let us see 'em, you old thief," cried the mate. "Where can they be found?"

"I go 'shore, and send man wid you. Only mile from here."

The second mate looked to me for instructions.

"Take two hands with you, jump into a canoe and go after them. I will pay for them if they suit you."

I feared that the rascals would not catch at the bait; but they did, and quickly. They suspected no trick.

"I s'pose that you won't sail till night?" the mate asked, still sulkily.

"No," I replied; and mentally added, "unless something happens."

The mate called to his two followers, and they entered a canoe and shoved off; Cringy leaving in his own canoe at the same time.

"Remember," I whispered to Cringy, "that flag must be run up, and you will come off to take us over the bar; send the men on a long ramble, and then we will up anchor and sail. You understand me?"

The old darky grinned until his yellow fangs could be seen with awful distinctness. His eyes showed that he understood me, and would not fail to earn his hundred dollars. He shook his head and was off.

The crew were lounging about the deck as though not expecting an immediate order. All of our fresh stock was on board, and stowed away for future use. The coops were filled with chickens, and on the spanners, over the davits, were hung bunches of plantains and bananas, while nets of oranges were in the boats, the only places we had to stow them. A light breeze was rippling off the shore, just enough to work the Coquette out of the bay; and as we had nothing to wait for, I determined to commence preparations for going to sea.

"Man the windlass," I cried; and the crew, with a shout of joy, seized handspikes and obeyed.

The rogues were thinking of Havana, and the prize money which they were to receive if they arrived safe. They were

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eager to squander it, like all sailors, who work hard and throw away their earnings. They hove short, and then looked to me for commands.

"We can't get under way until the men return," I said, in answer to an inquiry. "They will be on board in the course of an hour or two."

This excited the indignation of the sailors, as I knew it would. They began to murmur that we were losing time, and that we incurred some danger in waiting for the lubbers. I let them grumble unreproved, but kept my eyes fixed upon the flagstaff in front of Cringy's house. It seemed that he would never hoist the signal agreed upon; and yet every moment was valuable, for I did not know how soon the mate and his companions would return. I walked the deck impatiently, and the murmurs of the men grew more threatening.

At last up went the flag. I could see old Cringy hoist it with his own withered paws, and then start for the beach; yet I pretended that I did not notice the signal, and waited for the men to make the discovery.

"Sail, ho!" shouted one of the crew, suddenly jumping upon the windlass in a state of great excitement.

"Where away?" I asked, apparently as much astonished as any one.

"The signal! the signal, sir!" was the cry. "A man-of-war is in sight from Cringy's bluff."

"Perhaps it may be a slaver like ourselves," I replied; "but here comes Cringy, and he can give us information."

The old darky hobbled down to the beach, and entered his canoe as though in a hurry. His men paddled off, and in a few minutes the boat was alongside, and Cringy gained the deck. The men left the windlass and crowded aft, anxious and excited; ready to fight if necessary, or to make sail and attempt an escape.

"What is it, Cringy?" I asked, in a loud tone, so that all hands could hear me.

"The cussed English frigate comin' down de coast, and will poke 'em nose in here sartin," was the answer, delivered in such a manner that I almost feared he was in earnest. But he gave me a quiet wink, and I was satisfied that it was only his playful habit of lying, which was second nature to him.

"We are trapped!" was the cry of the men.

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"No, s'pose dat you get underweigh now, plenty time to go clear," Cringy said.

The men did not wait for orders. They flew to the windlass, and commenced rowsing in the chain.

"Shall we leave the men on shore?" I shouted.

"Let 'em stay, and be cussed," was the answer.

"Then up with the fore and aft sails," I cried; and in a few minutes the Coquette was under steerage-way and heading from the harbor, the men working like horses in hoisting the sails and clearing the decks.

"For gold and Havana," was the cry; and before we gained the bar, the deck was clear, and the men smoking their pipes on the forecastle.

When we had crossed the bar, and the schooner was making fair progress towards the ocean, Cringy began preparations for leaving us. The village was some five miles astern, and nearly shut from view by the point of land which I have alluded to before; and yet, to the surprise of the crew, no sail was to be seen running along the coast, as they had supposed, bound for Gabun.

"Whar's that man-of-war you signalized from the bluff?" I heard one of the crew ask Cringy.

"O, she's coming by and by," was the answer.

"So's Christmas. I'll bet a pound of as good pig-tail as ever was raised in Virginia that you seed the wing of a gull, and supposed that it was a man-of-war. Mind you, I don't care if you did raise a false alarm, 'cos we is underweigh, and homeward bound. But you should be keerful in futer."

"You dink I no see vessel?" demanded Cringy, indignantly; "what you call dat, hey?"

The negro pointed with his long finger to windward, and sure enough we could see a large ship creeping around a point of land close in shore, and under easy canvas, as though time and fast sailing were no object. I snatched my glass from the hand of the steward, and took a long look at the stranger. I counted two tiers of guns, and knew by the cut of the sails, and build of the hull, that it was our old enemy, the Scorpion, on a cruise for the purpose of getting even with us, and repairing the disaster of Reago.

"Sail, ho!" cried the men.

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Cringy looked the astonishment I felt.

"So help me debel, I no see 'em!" the darky cried. "He keep so close in land, no one see 'em. Man-of-war, by golly, hey?"

"And an Englishman at that," I replied.

"Ah, dat be berry bad. Gib me my money, and I go ashore."

The old rascal wanted to desert us as soon as possible, so that he could swear he knew nothing about the slave trade.

The ship was about seven miles from us, and coming down at the rate of three knots per hour, for the wind was light. I considered for a moment our chances of esape, and I must confess that knowing as I did the sailing qualities of the Scorpion, I was not sanguine. She had the wind of us, and could spread a cloud of canvas if necessary, as I did not doubt she would before coming within long gun shot of us.

The crew were casting uneasy glances at the frigate, and conversing in low tones on the forecastle. I could see that they were determined to resist capture as long as resistance would be of any service, and had no idea of allowing the Englishmen to handle the gold which we had on board, and triumph over us at last. If we tacked ship and beat back to Gabun, even if we could have done so, we should be captured, for we could not discharge our cargo before the Scorpion or her boats would be upon us. If we crowded sail, there was a chance of our escaping during the light breeze, unless the wind left us and favored the frigate, which sometimes happens in those latitudes; for I have known a man-of-war to lie becalmed for hours, while a slaver, ten miles to the leeward, was making her escape with a three knot breeze.

"The ship sees us, sir," cried the men, "and is edging off from the land."

I altered the course of the schooner to correspond with that of the frigate, so that our relative positions could not be changed.

"De debel!" cried Cringy, "I no want to go to Cuba. Gib me de money, and I go shore. My wifeys no like me be gone long."

As he was of no use on board, and I was anxious to make sail, I gave him his money and Murphy's rifle, an article that he had long hinted he should like to own. He muttered profuse thanks, but did not seem to think that much ceremony was needed

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in uttering them, for by the time he had concluded he was in his canoe, and had shoved off.

"God bless yer!" he shouted, "and don't let de Englishman ketch yer."

He waved his hand, and then his people paddled for the nearest point of land, as though their master was uttering some strange oaths for the purpose of exciting them to do their utmost.

"There goes his studdin'-sails, sir," cried a man named Matthews, a sailor who had made ten voyages to the coast of Africa, and had been captured but once.

He was a thorough seaman, and a person to be relied upon, excepting when he had free access to liquor, and then he became the most drunken dog that ever landed upon the molé of Havana.

"Ay, and quick work he makes of it in setting them," I replied, not willing to withhold my admiration for the discipline that was displayed, even on board of an enemy. "He has gained none on us as yet, and we can show more canvas than we now spread. Get the squaresail ready, and let us show the fellow that we are not idle. Matthews, I want a mate, and you will make a good one, as long as you let liquor alone. I give you the appointment. Jump forward and stir up the men."

"I beg your pardon," said the new officer; "but I don't think I would try keels with that frigate. He's got the odds in his favor."

"Do you mean that we must yield without a struggle?" I demanded, indignantly.

"Not by a cussed sight," Matthews said. "I wouldn't consent to that, even if we were under his broadside, and every gun bearing upon us. I think that we can give him the slip in a different way, and not much danger either."

"Be lively," I said, "and reel off the way and means. Time is precious."

"I've bin on this 'ere coast afore," Matthews said, "and know all its harbors and creeks, and even the shoals. Twenty miles from us, to the leeward, is a creek, the mouth of it not to be seen, any more than Pedro's for hair. Tall trees hide the entrance till you is close on it. There's two fathom water chock up to the banks, and after you is in, it's as smooth as a mill-pond. We could run in at dark, and drop anchor till the Scorpion got out of the way. If we can hold our own till sundown, we can do 'em,

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take my word for it. I've seen it tried twice, and know the place well."

"Can you find the harbor in the dark?" I asked, eagerly.

"I can find it with one eye shut up, in the darkest night that Africa ever seed. There's only one trouble."

"Name it."

"The niggers is ugly in that place, and steal like a lawyer. They'd take the teeth out of a man's head, if he didn't keep his eyes open. They is a treacherous set, and would sell their own fathers for a shirt."

"But we can guard against that. The frigate is nearing us, I think, and I have a mind to try the dodge."

"It'll go, sir, depend upon it, unless the cap'n of the frigate is up to snuff, and I don't think, from what we have seen of him, that he is."

I resolved to try the plan at any rate, and even if we were discovered, thought we could stand a fair chance of beating off a boat expedition in case one was sent in after us. I therefore ordered the man at the wheel to port his helm, and we suddenly jibed over our fore and aft sails, and stood in towards the land in an angular direction, so as to keep our distance from the frigate. This brought the wind aft our beam, and enabled us to make good use of our fore and aft sails, and even use our topsail, top-gallant sail, and huge squaresail.

"Now we are walking, sir," said the new mate, coming aft. "The frigate has noticed that we changed our course, and has hauled in his lower studdin'-sails and braced up. He still carries his fore-topmast, top-gallant, and royal studdin'-sails; but I think we can hold our own with him, in this light breeze. He looks well, though covered with canvas and his two rows of teeth, like a giant in search of a breakfast. If we was only within gun-shot distance, how he would rattle our spars about our ears! But the Lord keep him off, for his company is disagreeable at close quarters, and I should no more care to be alongside than I should like to grapple with one of the alligators of 'Mud Creek.'"

"Is that the name of your harbor, Matthews?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; it's all the name that I ever heerd, and that's good enough for it."

"And there's alligators there?" I asked.

"No, sir, not in the harbor; but a little ways up the river

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there's lot of 'em, and ugly-looking chaps they is. Big fat ones, with jaws like the schooner's hatchway. I suspect that they grow large on account of their grub."

"Why, what of their grub?" I asked.

"Infants, sir," replied the mate, solemnly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, that the niggers what don't want big families, drops their young ones on the banks of the river, and when they yells, the alligators hears 'em and snaps 'em up like a piece of soft tack, and makes nothing of it."

"Do you believe it?" I asked, with some little show of horror, for I did not know but that the man was repeating an old salt's tale.

"Believe it?" asked the mate; "why, Lord love you, I have seed 'em do it time and time agin, and think no more of it than if they had left a monkey to be scoffed by the monsters. And yet, sir, people who don't know what they is talking about, say that we is sinful for taking the niggers from their homes. Why, it's doing 'em a charity to larn 'em something, and the Englishmen will find it out some day or other, you jist mark my words."

I had my own idea on that point, and was not disposed to dispute with Matthews. I knew that the slave trade was a profitable business, and that I had earned much money which I had obtained in running a cargo, and I was willing to confess that my conscience was not badly hurt by the operation. I liked the money, but not the trade; and I think that such feeling will be found in every kind of profession.

"The frigate does not gain on us, that I can detect," I said, at length, after a long look through the glass. "The fellow sails well in this light wind."

"He is doing very well, sir," replied Matthews, with a careless glance at the Scorpion; "but if he can't do better than that, we shall give him the slip at dark. It wants an hour to sundown, and then comes darkness. We shall know if they keep a bright watch on board, for they will need one to see us slip into 'Mud Creek.'"

"We may as well increase our distance from him," I said. "The wind is light, and the men want something to do to keep their minds from an English prison. Rig a few whips, and let us wet the sails so that not a breath of air shall escape us. We have time enough, and men enough."

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"Ay, ay; I'll give 'em such a wetting, that the sails will look as though they had passed through three rain squalls under the line; and I need not tell you that it rains there sometimes, as though they had pumped up all the fresh water ponds, and then turned them loose for the fun of the thing. Ah, ha; we'll get another half knot out of the beauty, you see if we don't."

The crew were set at work rigging whips at the mastheads and others to drawing water, and in a few minutes the sails were wet, alow and aloft, every thread in them being saturated so that they would swell, and prevent the wind from passing between them, yet our labor seemed about to be wasted; for as the sun went down the breeze gradually died away, and as the schooner rose and fell on the heavy swells that were rolling towards the shore, the sails flapped and groaned as though eager to be once more filled, and go to sleep.

"This is bad," said Matthews, with a whistle for more wind. "I really believe that the frigate holds the breeze, for her sails look as though full. If she keeps it we shall have a little boat expedition in the course of the night, or I'm much mistaken."

"They won't attack us in their boats, if they can reach us with their guns," I said. "We once learned them a lesson they won't forget very soon. They know we are well armed and resolute, and boats won't be used if they can reach us without their aid."

"No doubt you are right, sir," Matthews said; "but still the captain of that frigate would go all lengths to have a shy at us, and if he thought that he could take us, even by losing fifty of his men, he would do it. Flesh and blood are cheap, especially that of a sailor."

I directed my glass at the frigate while he spoke. She was no more than five miles from us, having gained since the breeze left us. I saw, to my joy, that the wind had also deserted the Englishman, and that the heavy sails were flapping against the topmasts with every motion of the ship.

"Jist you keep an eye on 'em, sir," the mate said, "'cos it's my opinion that he won't keep quiet long. My eyes ain't so strong as they used to be; but I think I see something of a bustle on board. They may be only hauling the foresail up, to keep it from chafing agin the shrouds. I can't tell readily."

"They have not hauled the foresail up," I said, after a look

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with the glass; "but they have the mainsail hanging by the buntlines."

"Ah, I thought so," the old man said, with a gratified look. "I thought my eyes was good for somethin' yet. If they have hauled up their main course 'tis for somethin', I'll warrant ye."

"It means," I said, after a short pause, "that they are hoisting out the launch, and that we are to have some warm work."

"Cuss me, if I didn't think so," the mate said, taking a huge chew of tobacco, as though it was the last he ever expected to refresh his mouth with. "If that feller isn't going to give his men a pull of five miles and not catch a bird arter all, then I'm a soger."

"If we could only catch a slight breeze," I muttered, "we should soon make the fellow hoist his boats up again. He would have his labor for his pains."

"We shall get a breath of air out of the north'rd and east'rd by and by," the old man said, pointing to a dark cloud which was slowly rising in that direction. "If we can catch it first, the frigate will have the trouble of hoisting up his boats, and we shall be the gainers."

The crew began to look anxious, and glanced towards the frigate, as though her company was not desirable.

"We may as well be ready for the boats," I said, "in case they come near us. Get up the ammunition, and load the guns. We'll give them a reception they won't expect, if they do attempt to board us."

For a few minutes all was bustle and confusion, in casting off the fastenings of the guns, and in ramming down shot and canister. As soon as this was done the guns were re-secured, and the men once more gathered around the windlass and whistled for a breeze. It was now sundown and still calm, so calm that we could hear the ceaseless roar of the surf as it beat upon the shore, sweeping in from the broad Atlantic, and ending its throes upon the white sands and rough rocks of the African coast. During all this time Gracia had sat silent, a contemplative spectator of what was passing upon the deck. Now she called me to her, and I gladly obeyed.

"Is there much danger?" she asked, with an anxious glance.

"Not at present," I replied. "When danger is near, I shall see that you are in a place of safety."

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"And you?" she asked.

"O, I shall stay on deck, and do my best to insure the escape of the vessel. We are not captured yet, and some hard blows must be exchanged before we are."

"Will you promise me that you will be careful, and not expose your life unnecessarily?" she asked, laying her hand upon my arm, and speaking so earnestly, that I wished for her sake we were leagues from the frigate.

"I will make that promise most readily," I replied, laughing, "for I love you too well to wish to lose you."

She tried to smile, but tears were in her eyes and she could not.

"His boats are in the water, sir," said Matthews, who was looking at the frigate with his glass.

"How many of them?" I asked.

"Four, sir, and they are pulling this way, as though they was anxious to finish us afore the dog watch ends. Give us a little air, and their ash oars may bend till they crack, but the Coquette will give 'em the slip."

The sun disappeared, but still the sails of the schooner flapped with every motion of the vessel. Not a breath of air was stirring excepting that created by the canvas as the Coquette rolled upon the heavy swells, and headed towards all points of the compass, yet did not surge ahead a single fathom.

"By the Lord, but this is worse than three-watered grog," muttered the mate. "There's not wind enough to stir a lady's curl, or a rope yarn."

"Let one of the men run aloft, and see if there is any air stirring up there," I said.

"Ay, ay, sir; but I don't think that he'll find any. Here, Bill, jump up to the t'gallant-yard, and see if you can hail a cat's paw. If you do, let us know, and we'll invite it to a gam. Be lively, man, or we shall have the trade winds before we hear from you."

The sailor obeyed the order, but not with that liveliness which the command seemed to require. He recollected that the promotion of the mate was very sudden, and that they had messed together in the forecastle — two things which a sailor long remembers.

"Mast head!" I cried.

"Sir," was the prompt response.

"Do you feel any air stirring there?"

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"I can feel a breath against the palm of my hand from the north'ard and east'erd," was the response.

"Jist where I said it would come from," muttered the mate.

"Can you see the boats?" I asked of the man who was perched on the top-gallant yard.

"No, sir; nor the frigate, either."

"Come down," I said; and Bill was about to descend, when he paused, and shouted, —

"I've got quite a little breeze here now, sir; and the topsail and t'gallant sail is all aback."

The man spoke the truth, for all at once a light breeze swept over the water and fluttered our fore and aft sails, and threw our square sails aback.

"Blow, good devil, and take the cock," cried the men, starting into life and activity by this unlooked-for favor, even if it did come from the direction of the frigate.

"We have got stern way on us, sir," said the man at the wheel.

"Then shift your helm. Lay aft here, and drop the peak of the mainsail. Ease off the mainsheet. Brace round the fore yard. Be lively, men, for every second is worth a hundred dollars."

The crew sprang to obey the orders, and the Coquette rapidly got out of irons, and once more pointed her nose in the direction which we were pursuing when the wind left us an hour or two before.

"Now we is off, sir," the mate said, after seeing that the sails were trimmed, and swayed up to catch every breath of air. "Now we move again, and no mistake. Do you see anything of that Englishman with your glass, sir?"

I took a look, and saw that the frigate, having caught the breeze first, had diminished the distance between us most materially; but it was evident that we were moving as fast as the Englishman.

"He's got to pick up his boats, sir, 'cos we is moving faster through the water than ash sails can send a blundering big launch. We shall gain on him unless he is handy with his hooks and tackles. Ha, there goes a rocket in the air, and it means somethin'."

"It means," I replied, "that the boats are to come alongside and be hoisted up. There goes a second one. The captain is in a hurry, or in a bad humor, I don't know which."

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"If we was only near him, I guess he'd let us know in what humor he was in," answered the mate, dryly.

Hardly had Matthews ceased speaking, when I saw a flash in the direction of the frigate, and then the heavy report of a cannon came floating to the leeward. Almost at the same instant we heard a splash in the water some forty fathoms astern of us, and we could see it boil and bubble as though a sperm whale had just breached while in a sporting mood.

"He is trying our range," I remarked.

"Yes, and blast him, if that shot is any evidence he has got it down pretty close. A pound more of powder would have pitched that piece of cold iron upon our deck, or I'm very much mistaken," the mate said, coolly replenishing his mouth with a fresh chew of tobacco, and casting his eyes aloft to see if the sails were drawing to advantage.

At this moment there was another flash to the windward, like a streak of heat lightning; and the sullen report of a cannon again reminded us that the Englishman was determined to knock away some of our spars, if the thing was possible. The ball struck the water about thirty fathoms from our weather quarter, but not in direct range of the schooner.

"Now we move again," said Matthews, coming aft after setting the squaresail. "The wind is hauling, and I shouldn't wonder if we had it on our quarter before four bells."

"How far are we from Mud Creek?" I asked.

The mate took the glass, and glanced long and anxiously towards the shore before he replied.

"As near as I can calculate, we are some five miles to the windward, but I can't tell for sartin till we round Pint Blank; you can see it here, off our lee bow, looking as black as fifty niggers. There's a shoal running out from the pint, but we can give it a good berth, and let the frigate look out for herself. I s'pose that he has got tired of pitching cold shot arter us, for he hasn't fired a gun for ten minutes."

The commander of the frigate appeared to have discovered that he was losing ground by keeping up a running fire, and therefore his guns had remained silent ever since we had set the squaresail. I found that we were dropping our fierce friend, and I began to debate whether it would be better to keep our course, and attempt an escape by our sailing qualities, or find shelter in Mud

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Creek. I had examined my maps of the coast, and not found any evidence of the river, and so I told Matthews.

"Charts is all very well, but the marines what makes 'em don't know every thing."

"Breakers ahead!" shouted the men on the lookout.

"I told you so," cried Matthews, triumphantly. "I knows this coast, I does, as well as I knows how to hand and reef a sail."

We luffed up two points, hauled the sheets flat aft, and braced up the fore yards, and passed to the windward of the shoal which was covered with white water; for the swell was breaking over it rather wildly.

"Now, if that jolly old frigate would only just run head first on the shoal, we could go about our business and care for nobody," Matthews said, as we passed the dangerous spot, and once more kept the schooner off with a free wind.

"How far off is the frigate?" I asked.

"Not more than three miles; but that will answer our purpose, I think. We are now close aboard of Mud Creek, and if you will begin to make preparations for taking in sail, I'll go for'ard and pilot the schooner in. We had better edge off a little, and get in with the land. As soon as we bring that dark hill on our beam, we can take in the squaresail, and all but the fore and aft sails, for they won't be of much use."

We were running along a dark coast, heavily wooded, I judged, at the rate of four knots per hour, and so close in shore that I could hear the surf moan as it beat upon the rocks, retreating with broken ranks from a conflict which had been carried on for ages, and always with the same result. The crew were alert and watchful, for they had got wind of the contemplated ruse from the mate, and were eager to turn the laugh upon the Englishman.

"Keep her off a little more, sir," cried Matthews, from the night heads, where he had taken up his station.

The man at the wheel obeyed.

"Steady as she goes!" was the cry forward.

By this time the hill was well off our lee beam, and the time had arrived to commence taking in sail.

I glanced at the frigate astern. She was still coming on with all sail set, and those on board had not seen the shoal, for which

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she was heading. If she struck, the breakers would not leave a sign of her timbers by morning. I was sorry, and would have fired a gun as a warning, for love had made my heart tender just at that time, but we were too much occupied with thought of our own safety to attend to others.

"Steady as she goes!" shouted Matthews. "Steer small, or the schooner will bump her nose among the trees."

"Steady as she goes!" I replied.

"Douse the foresail, flying-jib, and stand by the mainsail," cried the mate, who was still straining his eyes to find the entrance to the creek.

The sails were let go, and came down slowly and without noise; for we did not wish to awaken the natives who resided upon the banks of Mud Creek, or even to let the crew of the frigate hear us, although there was not much danger, the vessel being so far to the windward. We seemed so close in with the land, that an active man could have jumped on shore. Branches of trees were on each side of us, and some of the longest touched the yards of the schooner, yet still we went on, deeper and deeper into the gloom.

"Stand by the main-sheet!" cried the mate, "and haul the mainsail flat aft, when I give the word."

Half a dozen of the men came aft to perform the duty, wondering and expressing their surprise.

"Hard aport with the helm — in with the main-sheet, and let go the jib," were the quick commands of Matthews; and as he issued the orders the Coquette suddenly rounded a low point, even to the water's edge, on which huge trees grew in abundance, and then slowly glided into a dark basin, into which the only light admitted was by the bright stars overhead.

All was silent as we moved in. There was not even a fire or light on the land, to show how far we were from it. All was calm and quiet, and the waters of the creek were as smooth as a mill pond.

"Eh," muttered one of the men, as he coiled up the main-sheet, "if this isn't as dark as the devil's pit, or as if the shore was lined with niggers ten times blacker than coal tar."

I had a poor opinion of the place; but if it only afforded us safe refuge, I did not care how repulsive it was in appearance.

"You can let go the anchor whenever you please," said Mat-

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thews, who had found his way aft, while the schooner was slowly forging ahead. "We haven't got much room to swing in, and twenty-five fathoms of cable will hold us just as well as a seventy-four's scope."

"Then drop the anchor at once, and lower a boat," I said.

The anchor fell with a sudden splash from the bows, a few fathoms of the chain run out, and the men were about to clear away the falls of the boat, when from the shore arose the most frightful yells that ever mortal had the unhappiness of listening to. For a minute I was dumb with surprise and apprehension, and still the yells continued, sometimes approaching us and then receding; but from all sides the cries resounded, and rather increased than diminished.

"Keep fast the boat!" I shouted; "clear away the guns, and stand ready to aim them. Pass the muskets from the store-room, and mind don't throw away a shot. If we are attacked, we will beat the black rascals back."

"Ah, 'tain't much use fighting such as them, sir," said an old sailor, who was standing by one of the boat falls.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean, sir, that them 'ere cries is made by the spirits of dead niggers what have been stolen from the coast of Africa by slavers. They is rejoicing 'cos our end is near."

"You old fool, do you believe such stuff as that?" I asked, angrily. "The yells are made by the natives who think of attacking us. We must beat them off, and do it boldly."

"No niggers ever made noises like that 'ere," said the man, solemnly. "If we fight, we must fight spirits from the other world."

"And I suppose that you would like different kind of spirits?" I asked.

"I can take my tot of grog with the best of 'em," answered the old man; "but I can't face the devil unless very drunk."

"Then go below, and let your shipmates fight your battle. We can beat off the natives, and still escape from the Englishman. Go below if you don't want to fight."

"I can fight human beings, sir, and even niggers, but I can't fight spirits."

"No one asks you to. Keep out of the way if you are afraid, and don't expect the honors we shall gain."

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Still the fierce yells continued, and seemed to increase in volume. We could hear them, even to the water's edge, as though all the niggers in the universe were howling their wrath at us from the shores of Mud Creek. The slaves which we had confined in the hold of the schooner began to grow uneasy during the excitement, and uttered many shouts, as though to warn us that they were disposed to add to our trouble.

"In the name of God and man, what is it?" asked Matthews, with a faltering voice, as he joined me on the quarter-deck. I could not see his face, it was so dark, but I had no doubt it showed as much fright as his voice.

"You have been here before, and should know," I replied.

"So help me God, cap'n, I never heard anything like that before, and never want to again. Niggers or devils, they can beat anything in the noise line I ever saw on this coast. If we could only give 'em a broadside of grape and canister, I think it might settle 'em."

"And let the Englishman know that we are here?" I asked.

"I forgot that, sir," was the answer. "The feller would hear us, sure enough. I had better tell the men to save the guns until the last moment, and beat the devils off with pikes."

As no foe made its appearance, there was no necessity for giving such orders. But still we waited and watched for half an hour, and at length the sounds died away and entirely ceased.

"God be praised! we shan't be attacked to-night," the mate said; "the devils, or niggers, or whatever they are, have thought better of it, and we are safe. Let 'em come by daylight and I don't care for 'em, but I don't like fighting with spirits in the dark. Unless it be," the mate added, after a pause, "the spirit of Santa Cruz rum, which I can punish dreadfully when we come to close quarters. I can take a good freight aboard, and no harm done on either side."

It was a strong hint for a glass of grog, so I concluded to humor the old salt, as there was plenty of liquor on board which had belonged to Murphy. I called to the steward to "splice the main brace," and the men came rolling aft, eager to get a drink of that which empties their pockets with wonderful rapidity when once on shore, after a long cruise.

"Now I can take a boat and two hands, and pull out to the mouth of the creek, if you want to know the position of the Eng-

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lishman," the mate said, and as I was really eager to find out, consented that he should go.

The boat was lowered without noise, quietly pushed off, and pulled for the mouth of the creek; while the men, fatigued by their day's labor and its excitements, laid down upon the deck, and rested with their pikes in their hands, so as to be ready to repel boarders in case an attack was made. In the meantime an old sailor and myself alone paced the deck.

CHAPTER XI.

NEWS OF THE FRIGATE. — A NEW CAUSE FOR ALARM. — PREPARATIONS FOR AN ATTACK. — THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED. — DON CHRISTO.

SOMETHING more than a hour later the sound of oars was heard coming from the direction of the entrance of the creek.

"Boat ahoy!" I hailed.

"Ay, ay, — all right," was the answer, in Matthews's voice.

The boat was soon alongside, and the mate on deck.

"Have you seen the frigate?" I asked, impatiently.

"We have been looking at her for the past hour," was the answer.

"Where is she?"

"Opposite the entrance of the creek," was the reply.

"Then those on board know that we are here?"

"I think not, sir," replied Matthews. "The ship is becalmed, for there is not a breath of air outside, and since we have been on the watch she has not moved a cable's length ahead. I think they imagine we carried the breeze with us, and escaped. At any rate, daylight will tell the story. If the captain thinks we are here, he will send his boats in arter us, and a lively time we shall have of it for an hour or two."

"Then the boat must return to the mouth of the creek, and remain there till the frigate either hoists out her boats, or gets a breeze. We shall be safe till daylight, at any rate."

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"We might send Martin for one hand in the boat, and Pedro for the other," the mate said. "Pedro will keep awake, or I'm much mistaken; for he has done some things which would not sound well on board of an English man-of-war. Martin is too much afraid of the devil to shut his eyes, and between them both they will do very well."

I was of the same opinion, so I sent the Spaniard and the Englishman off in the boat, with orders to keep under the shadow of the trees, and let us know the first movement that took place on board of the Englishman. Then, feeling tired with my day's and night's work, I left Matthews in charge of the deck, while I went below to console Gracia for my lengthy absence.

The lady was sleeping soundly upon the lounge when I entered the cabin. She looked so handsome that I stood for a few minutes admiring her, and then, thinking it would be cruel to disturb her slumbers, concluded not to awaken her. I laid down upon the transom, and before I knew it I was sound asleep; and continued to sleep until I felt a hand placed upon my shoulder, when I started up, and found that it was Matthews who had awakened me.

"What is the matter?" I asked, in a low tone, so that Gracia should not be disturbed.

"It is nearly daylight, sir," he said; "and from what I can hear, I should think that the niggers was about to make us a visit from the shore. I can hear 'em move on the beach and can hear 'em talk, but I can't make out what they is saying or doing."

"I will come on deck immediately," I replied; and Matthews left the cabin on tiptoe.

I got up, armed myself with a brace of revolvers and a cutlass, and was about to pass on deck, when I heard Gracia muttering some words in her sleep. I stopped and listened.

"O, my padre," she said, "you must love Robert for my sake. He loves me and saved my life, and without him I do not wish to live."

The dear girl! how I loved her for those words spoken so unconsciously. I bent down and touched her lips, and then, fearful that her beauty would detain me from duty, hastened on deck.

"The black rascals is moving, sir, pretty lively," said Matthews, when I joined him on the quarter-deck. "They have

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been jabbering for half an hour or more, and have been breaking off branches of trees; and once in a while I guess they have got up fights among themselves, for I hear 'em squawking awfully."

There was no appearance of their being about to embark in their canoes, and I could only imagine that they were getting ready to attack us as soon as daylight appeared. If they did attack us we were not in good condition to show much fight, except with boarding pikes and cutlasses; for if we used our guns the attention of the crew of the frigate would be attracted by the noise, and an expedition fitted out to find us. The men were all stationed, and instructed not to use fire-arms, only as a final resort, to save the schooner from being carried by boarding. I also caused thirty-two pound shot to be placed along the bulwarks and near the taffrail for the purpose of staving the canoes, and thus consigning their contents to the alligators of the creek, which Matthews informed me abounded there, and were not partial in their eating.

By the time we completed our preparations for defence, — not forgetting our boarding net, which was triced up fore and aft, and would puzzle the negroes considerably when they butted their heads against it, — the mists were rapidly rising from the water, and the light began to increase fast. Still we could hear the natives on shore continue their preparations for attack; but we could not understand why they should make so much noise about the matter, unless satisfied that concealment was useless, and that we were certain to be overpowered by superior numbers, — a reflection that was not at all comfortable.

But while I was watching for the mists to clear away, a new trouble arose. The slaves which were confined in the hold, and had not been fed or cared for since the morning they were shipped, now began to show evidence of hunger and thirst by uttering fearful howls, like those of wild beasts. These cries, if heard on shore, would only excite the natives of Mud Creek to desperation; as they would then be aware that we were loaded with negroes, and if captured could be sold to the next trader that happened along, and quite a profitable bargain would be the result. Half a dozen of the men threw off the gratings which were over the hatches, and sprang down in the midst of the wretches, whips in hand. It was the usual manner of quieting those who were disposed to be refractory. Blow followed blow in quick

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succession, until at length only groans and stifled sobs were heard. This was more than I could stand, so I moved aft and got out of the hearing of such doleful sounds. As soon as the slaves were quiet, however, and to keep them still, their breakfast was served out to them, with a pint of fresh water to wash it down. O, how the poor wretches begged for more! but a pint was the allowance, and if they died they could receive no more. This morning they ate their rice and drank their water in the hold, ten being released at one time for that purpose. Even the pure air of heaven was denied them that day.

Suddenly the sun shot out from behind some dark clouds, and began to dry up the vapors which were arising from the creek and land. Then we began to catch a glimpse of the natives, and it seemed as though there were thousands of them. Even the trees were alive with the black rascals, and I could not help admiring the agility with which they leaped from branch to branch, with a recklessness that was astonishing. Suddenly Matthews uttered a hoarse laugh, and clapped his hands — actions which were answered with corresponding yells on the part of the natives.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Why, the miserable impostors," the mate said, with another laugh, "them 'ere ain't niggers."

"Why, what are they, then?"

"Why, howrang howtangs, sir, and a devil of a lot of 'em there is."

It was true — the shores were lined with huge orang-outangs, and their cries had alarmed us during the night, and made us anticipate a fight. When we dropped anchor, the noise had awakened them from their slumbers, and they had responded with yells.

At eight bells I signalized for the boat to come alongside, and report the position of the frigate. Martin said she had drifted some two miles since daylight, but there was not a breath of air stirring upon the ocean, and no appearance of any. The frigate, however, was so far from the entrance to the harbor, that it was considered quite safe to use fire-arms, in case we should have occasion to resort to them. This information I was thankful for, as many ducks were constantly alighting in the harbor, and I wanted a few. Not desiring to be taken unawares, I let the men get their breakfast, and then sent them back to the

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entrance of the harbor, to keep watch upon our foes, and see that they did not send an expedition of boats in search of us.

As soon as we finished breakfast I went on deck, and was surprised that the orang-outangs still maintained their positions, and showed no signs of moving. What was still more astonishing, not a native had shown himself for trade, and I could not account for it. I ordered the boat to be lowered, and thought that I would proceed on an exploring expedition up the river, at least as far as the village; but while I was getting my rifle and revolver in good condition for the rather hazardous trip, a canoe with one person in it hove in sight, coming round the point of land where the current of the river makes a bend before its entrance into the creek.

The stranger wore a straw hat and a calico shirt, and his face was dark and covered with a heavy beard, so that I knew at once that he was not a negro. He seemed uncertain what to do, and evidently was a little fearful of us. I could see that he wanted to board the schooner; for he would make a dip with his paddle and head the canoe towards us, then would alter his mind and steer in towards the shore, and appear inclined to turn back. At length I tired of such backing and pulling, and beckoned the stranger to come on board, an invitation which he obeyed after a moment's hesitation.

The crew crowded to the rail to see our visitor. He was a man about forty-five years of age, and, from his dark restless eyes and swarthy complexion, I judged him to be a Portuguese or Spaniard; many people of both nations being engaged in the slave trade on the coast, and had been since the opening of the business by our English cousins, many years since. He left his canoe and came on board, touching his hat with a polite bow to Mr. Matthews as he passed over the rail. As he walked aft I saw his black eyes fixed upon Gracia, with astonishment and wonder at her rare beauty.

"Senor," he asked, "do you speak Spanish?"

I answered in that language that I did; and I was so well acquainted with the tongue I instantly discovered that our visitor was a Portuguese, and not a Spaniard, as he wanted me to think.

"Did you come for a cargo?" he asked.

I told him that our cargo was already on board.

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"May I ask why you came here?" the Portuguese said, whose name, he told me with an air of dignity, was Don Christo.

I did not consider that it would be prudent for me to say that we were chased in by an English frigate, for I did not entertain a very favorable opinion of Don Christo, and he looked to me like a man that would not scruple to sell us for a fair sum of money. I did not know but that a signal could be made from the land giving information of our whereabouts.

"We put in for water," I said, carelessly. "We have been becalmed for a week, and I am fearful that we shall get short before we reach Havana. The water is good up the river — is it not?"

"None better, senor. A mile from this place it is clear and sweet. If you don't care about exposing your men, I can send you a canoe load towards night."

"For a consideration," I said.

"Certainly, senor."

"Then send it along."

The Portuguese looked gratified. I thought it was on account of the patronage he was to receive.

"You are well armed for a slaver," he said at length, casting his eyes over the deck, and looking at the men and guns.

"It is necessary, if a successful trip is to be made."

"And your men?" he asked.

"Know how to handle the guns," I answered.

He said no more on this point, but I saw that his eyes were busy during the remainder of his stay on board; and I thought at the time, such was my pride in the Coquette, that he was admiring the schooner as she deserved to be.

Don Christo told me he had been on the coast for twenty-five years, and during that time had helped ship some hundreds of cargoes. I hinted that he must be very rich if such was the case; but he said, with a laugh, that he squandered as he went along, and that his liberality had ruined him; which, if such was the case, his heart belied his face most shockingly. But I pretended to believe his yarns, and managed to treat him civilly.

"By the way," I asked, "how happens it that you are the only person we have seen since we dropped anchor here?"

"It is all owing to those infernal brutes," he answered, point-

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ing to the orang-outangs, which seemed to be dozing at the time."

"Explain," I said.

"Once a year the brutes come to the creek in troops for the purpose of getting a taste of salt water, which they seem to desire annually, but not oftener. At such times they are dangerous to meet, and would no more think of strangling a dozen niggers than you would in selling them for a handsome price. The animals are powerful and cunning, and are only afraid of fire-arms. Sticks and clubs they care nothing about, but discharge a musket at them, and they will retreat. Most always the natives leave the river when the brutes arrive, and let them have undisputed sway. They only stop about forty-eight hours, and that is the last we see of them, unless we penetrate the back country, until the next year."

"Are the natives of the river treacherous?" I asked, for the purpose of seeing how his account would tally with Matthews's story.

The visitor seemed astonished at the question.

"I have lived here on the river for ten years," he said, "and I assure you on the word of a Spanish cavalier that I never saw anything to justify such a charge. They are brave and warlike; but they meet their enemies and friends with bold fronts, and do not resort to treachery to accomplish their designs. O, no; the natives of the river are the true Pangwees of Africa."

The man spoke so sincerely I was almost inclined to believe him; and I think that I should have done so if it had not been for his eyes, which were so restless and impatient, never for a moment meeting my glance with one of confidence. I also noticed that Matthews hovered as near us as he could without committing a breach of etiquette. He seemed desirous of saying something to me; but I supposed it related to ship's duty, and did not pay much attention to him.

"I am glad I used my canoe this morning, since it has enabled me to make your acquaintance, and render you some assistance," Don Christo said, with an effort to appear frank. "I thought I would paddle down and see if the orang-outangs had taken their departure, so that the natives could come back. I suppose that they would have done so, had they not been attracted by the mysteries of your schooner. It is not often that they get sight of a vessel, and we cannot wonder at their astonishment."

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"Will you enter the cabin and take a drink?" I asked. "Perhaps you are thirsty after your long paddle."

"Well, to tell the truth, I am somewhat dry; and as for a glass of liquor, I have not seen one for six months."

We left Gracia on deck, and entered the cabin. Just as we were descending the companion-way, Matthews made a sign that he wanted to speak to me; but I shook my head, and the mate fell back. The steward placed bottle and glasses on the table, and the stranger poured out a stiff one, that would have done no discredit to the mate.

"Your health and prosperity," he said; and in an instant the liquor had vanished from sight.

I pushed the bottle towards the man, and he took another pull at it that would have floated a jolly boat.

"Have you ever visited this place before?" Don Christo asked.

"Never."

"I suppose that some one of your crew has?" he continued, carelessly.

I was on the point of saying "yes," but thought "no" would answer, and uttered the monosyllable.

He looked a little astonished, but was forced to believe me. I read in the man's flashing black eyes that he was pumping me, but for what object I could not divine. I watched his motions narrowly, although pretended not to. I hoped I might discover why he had visited us.

"Pray, senor capitan," the visitor asked, "how did you find your way here? The harbor is not down on the charts, and vessels only visit us when hard pressed by a cruiser."

"O, I was told that there was such a place by a captain who has been here two or three times. At least he said so. You know him, perhaps. Captain Switchell, of the brig Albion — man with a red nose and gray hair. He has run three cargoes to Cuba within eighteen months. Fine man, and a good sailor; fights like the devil when cornered."

"I have heard of him," the Portuguese replied, after a moment's thought.

I knew that he must have some knowledge of the man I described, as I had only heard of him as a successful slaver, who had long been on the coast.

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"If he was ever here, it must have been while I was in the interior of the country," Don Christo said, after a while, during which he remained in deep thought.

"You don't drink," I cried, motioning towards the bottle.

He started, and filled his tumbler.

"Did Captain Switchell allude to this place in any particular manner?" my visitor asked, with his eyes fixed on his tumbler.

"He merely said that fresh provisions and good water were to be obtained here," I replied.

"That is true," he answered, with a sigh of relief. "But I see that you have plenty of fresh grub."

"But we can take care of a canoe load in addition. My men are good eaters."

"And good fighters, I suppose?"

The Portuguese spoke quick, and looked me hard in the face as he put the question.

"You can bet on that," I replied, proud of the bulldog-like qualities of my men.

"I thought they looked as though capable of giving and receiving some heavy blows. There's twenty of them, I think."

"Twenty-five, all told," I answered.

"Ah."

This was all the visitor said, but to me it seemed significant.

"Come, finish your grog, and then let us go and have a crack at the orang-outangs. I have promised my wife one."

"Agreed; and I will take you in my canoe," Don Christo said.

"Why in your canoe?"

"Because we can approach the shore nearer without frightening the animals," was the answer.

For a moment I was inclined to go with him; but I recollected that Gracia had said she wished me to take her in the boat when I went to shoot one, and on that account I declined the offer. The Portuguese looked disappointed for one moment, and then his face was as frank appearing as it was possible for a face like his to assume.

We went on deck, where we found Gracia still watching the gambols of the animals, and laughing most heartily, in her girlish innocence, at some of their freaks. The eyes of the Portu-

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guese seemed like coals of fire as he regarded her wonderful beauty.

"O, captain," my visitor said, "your wife is handsome enough for a queen."

"She is handsome enough for me," I replied, rather tartly, for I did no relish his admiration.

I ordered the second quarter boat to be lowered, and the awning placed over the stern-sheets, for the purpose of shielding us from the sun. By these preparations Gracia knew that she was to have a row, and clapped her hands at the idea.

"The boat is ready, sir," Matthews said; and then whispered, "I would like to see you for a moment before you leave the vessel."

"Anything of importance?" I asked, carelessly.

"No, sir; not that I knows of," Matthews replied, blundering in his speech in such a manner that I looked up from examining my rifle in astonishment.

I saw that Don Christo had unceremoniously thrust his head in between us while the mate was speaking, and such a cool act of impudence had disconcerted the old salt most materially. Christo seemed anxious that Matthews and I should not exchange a word together while he was on board. I considered it barely possible that the Portuguese might remember the face of my mate, and fear his giving some information. I thought that, without distrusting human nature greatly, I understood the character of my visitor.

"Come, Gracia," I said, "the boat is waiting for us."

She skipped towards me, and I passed her over the side as carefully as though she was a casket of jewels.

"Come, Don Christo," I said, "we want your company also."

"O, pardon me, senor; but I will remain on board, for in a minute I must start up the river."

This did not suit me. I did not care that he should vagabondize over the vessel, and talk with the crew.

"Your company is too pleasant to lose. Come, Don Christo, you will not slight the society of a lady."

He could not refuse any longer. He passed over the rail, and took his place in the boat. I was about to follow him, when Matthews placed his hand upon my shoulder, and whispered,—

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"Cap'n, he's a blasted rascal."

"O, is he?" I asked, with a smile, and without another word took my seat in the boat by the side of Gracia.

The boat was pushed off, and we rowed slowly towards the nearest land, where the orang-outangs were collected in large numbers. The brutes appeared greatly interested in our appearance, and chattered and grinned most hideously. A dozen of the eldest advanced apparently to meet us; and one old fellow, whose head was perfectly white with age, even waded in the water for a few inches, as though to be the first to offer us a welcome. We attracted so much of his attention he did not see a dark head that suddenly made its appearance above the water, and, after a brief survey of things, disappeared.

"Lay on your oars," I said to the men. "We shall soon witness a little fun."

The men did not understand what I meant. They looked as though they would like to see some.

The black head, which had disappeared so quietly beneath the water, did not remain concealed long. Suddenly, while the animals were yelling and daring us to land, there was a slight ripple at the feet of the veteran orang-outang. Then there was a plunge, and the water was lashed into foam; but amidst it I could see the ape, with his long sinewy arms, tearing at the scales and fins of an alligator, which was craunching one of his feet, and endeavoring to drag him to a deep place.

Gracia, with a secret thought that the whole thing was got up for her especial benefit, clapped her hands with glee, and did not miss a single struggle. She was a true Spaniard, and although her heart was as gentle as a dove's, yet she was partial to bull-fights and kindred excitements.

When the struggle between the alligator and the orang-outang commenced, the companions of the latter remained silent for a moment, as though too astonished to utter a yell. But when they saw the fight, and heard the shrill screams of their companion, they uttered yell after yell of savage hatred, and in their fury tore off branches — large branches, too — of the trees, and hurled them towards the scene of the combat with a force that showed most conclusively their terrible strength and power.

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But the scaly monster did not quit his terrible grasp. He struggled to gain deep water where he could have his adversary more in his power, and the orang-outang labored as hard to drag the alligator to the shore, and in this some of his companions sought to assist him; but their dread of water prevented them from taking an active part. Inch by inch, the alligator pulled his victim towards deep places, and at length, with a sudden plunge, they rolled from the shelving-bank, and disappeared where the water was two fathoms deep, and only a few bubbles marked the spot where the enemies had sunk.

For a few minutes we sat in the boat without exchanging a word, after witnessing the contest. Even Gracia seemed slightly shocked at the end of the brute, and I feared every moment that she would issue an order, commanding me to avenge its death by shooting the first alligator I should meet. But for a wonder she was silent and thoughtful.

Suddenly there was a commotion on shore, and we could see young orang-outangs hurry off in different directions, keeping close to the edge of the water.

"Now," said the Portuguese, "the apes are resolved to have revenge, and you will notice how deliberate and determined they will proceed to execute their plans."

"But I observe that many of them are stripping branches from the trees, and making quite convenient clubs," I remarked.

"Yes, and they know how to use them, as you will find. A dozen orang-outangs, armed with clubs, can clear a village of its inhabitants. They possess the strength of two men, and fear nothing but fire-arms."

"But what are they in search of?" Gracia asked, pointing to the apes which were running along the shore, towards the point which formed the entrance to the river.

"In search of an alligator," replied the Portuguese.

I could not help smiling.

"It is true, senor," Don Christo said, with some earnestness. "They will find an alligator basking in the sun, and they will kill him."

"O, I should so like to see that!" Gracia exclaimed.

"Nothing can be easier, senorita. As soon as they find what they seek, information will be sent to the older members of the

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tribe, and they take command and move towards the enemy to be attacked. We can row towards the point, and witness everything from the boat."

I must confess that my curiosity was excited, and I was anxious to witness the proceedings of the animals. If they performed feats, such as the Portuguese related, their instincts would look very much like human reasoning, much as we might deny it. Suddenly we saw three or four young orang-outangs run with remarkable swiftness from the mouth of the river, towards the main body of the animals. The scouts which carried the information, that they had discovered an alligator, were received with dignified silence by a council. They imparted the news with violent gestures, and such gnashing of teeth, as excited men often resort to to express their rage. They pointed in the direction of the river, and by signs which even we could understand, intimated that the alligator which they had found was sleeping soundly, and could be attacked at a great disadvantage.

We could see the gray heads deliberate for a few minutes, after this information, and set out upon the expedition which was to avenge their honor. The members of the council were preceded by the scouts, which led the way, and after the council followed the whole colony, each one of the male portion being armed with a huge club, which looked as though it would trouble even a strong man to swing with effect.

"Now, if it please you to follow along the shore in the boat, we shall witness the fun," said Don Christo.

The animals presented a most formidable appearance as they marched along in silence, armed with their huge clubs, which they carried on their shoulders, nearly as a soldier would carry a musket. There seemed to be something of a military character in their march, also; for I noticed that the females and young ones brought up the rear, and to keep the tongues of the gentle sex in order, a dozen or twenty of the warriors of the troop marched close at hand, and exhibited spite when a young one squeaked, or a female chattered. In this respect they closely resembled the people of civilized countries, who are unhappy when they have no wife or child to provide for, and are miserable when they do have, being determined not to be suited at any rate.

"Ah," murmured Gracia, "if they would only fight amongst themselves, what happiness it would be to see them."

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Ladies must recollect that she was born and educated in Cuba, where cock-fights, bull-fights, and such amusements, are looked upon by the *elite* of the island, as sports suitable for the edification of the most refined. She felt interested in such rough amusement, and did not think it was wrong to conceal it.

The orang-outangs refused to quarrel among themselves for her edification, and continued their march, silent but formidable, for the point of land where the alligator was basking in the sunshine, little thinking of the rough handling which he was to receive in return for the hearty breakfast which one of his companions had made an hour ago.

"Look!" cried Gracia, "the animals have stopped, and appear to be consulting together."

Our boat was exactly opposite the spot, and close in shore. We could almost see the orang-outangs wink, so near were we, yet they paid us not the slightest attention. Their whole thoughts were centred on the enemy of their tribe We could hear the old gray beards chatter, and see them point in various directions; and as they indicated what to do, a dozen would obey the orders without so much as a murmur, which I thought a very good lesson for humanity, and one deserving of remembrance.

"Now," said Don Christo, settling himself comfortably, and fanning his face with his Panama hat — for there was not a breath of air stirring, and the heat began to grow intense as the sun climbed the sky. "Now," he repeated, "we shall see some fun, for the arrangements are all made. The retreat of the alligator is cut off. He cannot escape to the woods and the marsh, for a strong guard watch him in that direction. He is hemmed in on all sides, and soon the signal for the fight will be given."

"The sooner the better," cried thoughtless Gracia, clapping her hands; and as though that was the signal agreed upon, a shrill yell, like the cry of a woman in distress, was uttered by one old fellow, who was ugly enough to be the grandfather of his satanic majesty.

The yell was repeated fifty times by the males, and then the females, as though they wanted to have their full share of noise, confusion, and use of tongue, re-echoed the cries until the children took them up, when, like civilized society, the females boxed the young ones' ears, and bit those who protested against such usage.

All this delighted Gracia very much, and she laughed until the

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tears ran from her dark eyes, and glistened on her cheeks like pearls exposed to the rays of the sun. I laughed because she laughed, and thought how happy I was in her love, and cared nothing for the frigate Scorpion, or at least forgot her for the time being.

"Now they are at it," cried Don Christo.

We looked towards the scene of action, and sure enough they were. We heard a blow which sounded like the flukes of a whale upon the water, and by taking a few strokes with the oars, were enabled to see how orang-outangs treated alligators.

The first blow which had been administered by the apes, had awakened the alligator from a deep sleep. Of course his first impressions were rather confused, and he merely rolled over to escape the infliction; but as blow followed blow in rapid succession, the alligator began to find his position rather uncomfortable, and headed towards the water. But for this the orang-outangs were prepared, and they showered blows upon his snout until I thought they would beat it to a jelly. But the rascal only groaned, and seemed determined to clear his path.

They struck at him every way. Some of the blows missed, and some landed on the heads of the orangs, and mighty yells were the result. They got in each other's way. They struck over each other's shoulders, and the young ones, as enthusiastic as their elders, plucked tufts of grass and threw at the object of attack, and yelled at the same time with fearful yells; but occasionally for their officiousness, an axious mother would scratch and bite the youngsters, and send them howling to the rear, where they would vent their feelings by making faces at their parents, and otherwise expressing disgust for those older than themselves.

But during all this the alligator was not idle. Finding that his approach to the water was cut off, he commenced fighting on his own account, and in a manner peculiarly alligatorish. Bending his body until it nearly formed a curve, the brute took sight at his enemies, and let fly his tail with a report like the crack of a coach whip. In an instant some half a dozen orang-outangs were tumbling heels over head, or flying through the air as though discharged from a gun. Then the yells were redoubled, and the blows fell faster than ever, a dozen of the apes taking the places of those prostrated. Sometimes we could hardly see the combatants for mud and dirt, which they threw into the air in

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their struggles; but if they were screened from view, we could hear the blows which were rained down upon the alligator, and could hear the crack of the tail as it sent dozens howling to the rear with broken bones and bruised limbs.

Suddenly the blows ceased, and a shout of triumph was raised, the panting orang-outangs leaned upon their clubs, and looked with savage complacency upon their work. They had conquered. The alligator lay upon the mud, a mass of bruises, and dead. The orang-outangs were avenged.

"Give way, men," I said; "we will go on board."

"Shall you go up the river, sir?" asked Don Christo.

"Not to-day," I replied.

"To-morrow, then," cried Gracia.

"To-morrow I am in hopes to sail, and by this time to be miles from here," I answered, coolly.

Gracia looked disdainful, and was silent. I said nothing until we arrived alongside, when I assisted the lady to the deck, and she instantly retired below to find relief in woman's true solace — a flood of tears, and affecting sobs.

"Perhaps I had better take my departure, and hurry along the water," the Portuguese remarked, after hanging around a few minutes, and finding that Gracia did not appear upon deck.

"Perhaps you had," I replied. "We shall want it this afternoon, or not at all."

"I will have it alongside by sundown, if not earlier;" and over the side the fellow went, and paddled away in his canoe.

No sooner had he entered the river, and was hidden from the deck of the schooner, than Matthews came aft with a long face.

"Do you know that marine?" he asked.

"He says his name is Don Christo," I replied.

"Don Thunderation!" cried the sailor, with a look of contempt. "That is the cussedest scoundrel that passes for a white man on this 'ere coast, and I wanted to tell ye so, but I couldn't run alongside, somehow, to do it; for he kept sheering aft, as though fearful I was about to board yer. I knew the cuss, right well, but he didn't know me, even if he did look mighty hard at me."

"What do you know of him?" I asked.

"I know that, ten years ago, he was a slave dealer, and carried on a swimming business; but he cheated the firm he was work-

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ing for, and had to weigh anchor and be off. He went down the coast, stole two hundred niggers, and sold 'em; and then made his peace by stealing a white woman, the wife of a skipper of a brig. He gave her to the king, and she died in two months. The king was furious at losing the woman, and swore that he would hang the rascal unless he was supplied with another. And, blast me, if the cuss didn't get hold of another, and she too died, raving crazy, in less than a month. How much the poor thing suffered you may imagine. I heard tell the last one was a edificated woman, and that she took it hard until her mind foundered, and then she used to laugh all day long."

"The rascal must have had some idea of playing false, when he endeavored to persuade me to go up the river just now with the lady," I said.

Just at this moment our boat was seen to leave the mouth of the creek, and pull leisurely towards us.

"The frigate is out of sight," I said. "If she was not, Martin would stick to his station."

"Then we can move with the land breeze this evening?" Matthews asked.

"As soon as the water is on board," I replied.

"The sooner the better, for I'm tired of this place, and, to tell the truth, 'taint very healthy."

The boat came alongside, and Martin jumped on deck and reported.

"She's out of sight, sir,—fairly drifted away, like a big log upon the water. We watched her till not even her rivals was to be seen. She's gone, and may the devil go with her."

"Amen!" muttered Matthews.

"Is there any air stirring outside?" I asked.

"Not enough to fan the cheek of a lady, sir. The ocean looks like a huge mirror, and not even a flying-fish dares show its head for fear of being roasted alive, for it's hot as —"

"Get up the awnings," I said, "and let the men keep under them, and out of the sun during the day. To-night we will sail, and, if nothing happens, in two weeks we shall be spending our money in Havana."

The men heard the latter part of my words, and gave a feeble cheer to show how much they relished the idea; and after the awnings were spread to shield the deck from the hot sun, which

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was pouring down as though determined to melt the pitch in the seams and our brains at the same time, I retired to the cabin to have a little chat with Gracia.

As expected, I found her inclined to be sulky, because I had not gratified her wish to visit the negro village. It was the first time I had ever refused her request, and she felt grieved in consequence. A delicate lace handkerchief was held to her eyes when I entered the cabin, and it was only removed long enough to see who intruded, and then it was returned, and symptoms of hysterics or sobs were apparent. I took my seat by her side upon the lounge, and spoke.

"Gracia," I said, attempting to take one of her small hands.

There was no response. She resisted the attempt to take her hand, and turned her back upon me.

"Dear Gracia," I cried, slipping an arm around her waist, and drawing her towards me, "do you feel very angry?"

"Yes, I do," was the answer; and she made a slight attempt to leave me, but I held her fast, and frustrated it. In fact I took occasion to increase the pressure around her waist, and felt very comfortable in consequence.

"Why should you feel angry, Gracia?" I asked.

"You know the reason," was the answer.

"And do you know the reason why I refused your request, Gracia?"

"Yes, because you no longer love me. But I might have expected as much."

There was another violent sob, and the handkerchief was used most energetically.

"No, darling," I answered, calmly; "it is because I love you dearly I refused to go up the river."

The handkerchief was removed for the space of ten seconds, just time enough to enable me to catch sight of two black eyes which expressed a scornful, incredulous look. Then the eyes and the face were again hid under a cloud of lace, and a sob floated through the cabin.

"I think, from your actions, that you do not believe me."

There was no response. I increased the pressure around her waist, — and a more symmetrical one was never clasped by man, — and managed to get possession of one of her hands, which I kissed most devotedly, for the very good reason that her face was concealed, and could not be approached.

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"When I tell you, darling, that the Portuguese is a most noted rascal — that he has already sold several white women to negro kings, and wanted to entrap us in a visit up the river, for the purpose of disposing of you and murdering me, you will readily believe that I was right in refusing your request."

The sobs ceased. She listened to my explanation in silence.

"The gale is moderating," I thought. "I think that we shall soon have a smooth sea and a light breeze."

"Is this true?" she asked, after a moment's silence, but with the lace still to her face.

"You know that I am incapable of deceiving you — you whom I love so dearly."

I spoke in a tone so convincing, that she could not resist full forgiveness. The lace was removed, and down upon my shoulder came her head with its triumph of black hair, so profuse that it almost covered my breast, and two black eyes, full of fun, looked in mine for pardon.

"Did you think I was angry, you sea monster?" she asked.

"I certainly did."

"And now you forgive me?" and she put up her red lips, and showed such white teeth, that with my forgiveness I tempered mercy, and did that which any sensible man would do had he been in my position. I kissed her most affectionately, and she didn't make the slightest objection.

"I was little angry," Gracia said, with a charming smile, "but not very, and I wanted to make you think that I was quite enraged, so that we could enjoy all the pleasures of a reconciliation. Wasn't that a good idea?"

Of course I was obliged to confess that it was an excellent device; and then we had a long and pleasant talk, and no one entered the cabin for some time to annoy us.

"Beg pardon, sir, for disturbing you," said Matthews, putting his head inside the cabin door, after discreetly knocking, and allowing me time to change my position. "Beg pardon, sir, but it is now two bells, and the water is jist comin' round the pint of land. That blasted rascal is with the canoes, and, if I was you, I would watch 'em."

The canoes, which were bringing on board the water and fresh provisions, were close under our bow. The canoe containing the water, as I supposed, was what the natives called a double-bank

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canoe, about thirty feet long and five feet beam. It was covered with a matting of leaves, so thick that it seemed as though capable of shedding water. Only one native was to be seen on board of it, and he was flourishing a paddle at the stern. The other canoe was much smaller, and contained vegetables, piled up so high that I thought there was some danger of its capsizing. In the bow of the latter stood Don Christo, and at the stern, steering with a paddle, was a negro of gigantic size and most ferocious appearance.

"Cuss me, if I wouldn't like to take jist one squint under that canoe cover," Matthews growled.

"What for?" I asked.

"I don't know — but I should!"

"Well, captain," cried Don Christo, from his canoe, "I have brought your supplies, and if you will throw me a rope I will haul alongside."

"What did you cover the water for?" I asked.

"O, to keep it cool and wholesome. You will like the flavor better. It is a practice here"

"The cussed rascal," muttered Matthews; "how I'd like to throw one of the cook's coppers at him, filled with hot water! I'd scald the villain, same as I'd scald a young pig."

One of the men threw a rope's end to the Portuguese, and the canoes slowly veered round with the tide, and swung alongside. Still Don Christo did not seem in a hurry to come on deck, and I noted that he talked with his negro companions in a language I had never heard before.

"Are you coming on deck?" I asked.

"In one moment, captain," was the answer.

The giant negro, I have before alluded to, arose from his position in the stern of the canoe, and muttered a few words to Don Christo in an earnest tone. The Portuguese answered, and made an impatient gesture with his foot.

"That feller would sell well in Havana, sir," whispered Matthews, who was standing by my side.

I nodded in token of assent.

"What's to prevent us from keeping him, now that we've got him?" continued the mate. "Say but the word, and we can have him safe under hatches in no time."

I shook my head. I did not like such treachery.

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"It's four hundred dollars, sir," he whispered; "and four hundred dollars ain't picked up on every sea."

"It would be a mean and treacherous piece of business. The next vessel that anchored in the harbor would have to pay for such an act with fearful loss of life."

"But it's for the black devil's good," persisted Matthews. "If we take him from here we make something of him in a few years. Jist as like as not he would be a Christian, and pray like the devil. Ain't that something?"

"It shan't be done," I said. "I despise all kinds of treachery, and you should also, or you are no sailor."

"I know my duty, sir," replied Matthews, somewhat abashed; "but what I proposed was for your benefit as well as mine. If you don't like the job I've no more to say."

Just at that moment I cast my eyes over the rail to see why Don Christo did not come on deck. To my intense astonishment I saw him and the giant negro removing the matting, which I supposed covered the water in the large canoe; but instead of water there were about forty woolly heads concealed beneath the mat, and at a word the bodies connected with the heads sprang to their feet, and grasping huge clubs, uttered a terrible battle-cry. At the same moment the vegetables in the other canoe were thrown overboard, and seven more negroes were seen, armed as the others.

CHAPTER XII.

A SURPRISE. — AN ATTACK, AND WHAT CAME OF IT. — A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE. — AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE. — A PROPOSITION, AND HOW WE RECEIVED IT.

PERHAPS it was lucky for us that the mate had forgotten to take down the boarding net, and with the single exception of the gangway it was triced up fore and aft. This was a defence which the negroes were entirely unacquainted with; and while they were staring at it with stupid wonder, neglecting the hurried commands of the Portuguese rascal who led them, my men had an

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opportunity to seize upon handspikes and levers, and make some preparations for defence. Our muskets were all below, and the guns on deck, although loaded, were entirely useless after boats were once alongside, as we could not depress them sufficiently to accomplish any great work.

My revolvers and cutlass, I recollected with dismay, were on the cabin table, where I had laid them during my conversation with Gracia. I cast one glance towards my men, and saw that they stood firm, and were already pounding at the woolly heads which peered over the rail, or struggled to cross it. I sprang towards the companion-way to secure my weapons, but to my surprise I met Gracia at the head of the steps holding the pistols and cutlass in her hands.

"I knew you would want them," the noble girl said, as she handed them to me, "so I thought I would bring them."

"Gracia," I said, "if I live long enough to marry you, our coat of arms shall be a heart as large as a mess kid, with two revolvers rampant."

"First beat off the negroes," she said, "and then we will talk of marriage." She looked a little frightened, but otherwise was cool, as every high born lady should be, in an hour of peril.

"Then down into the cabin with your precious self, and stay there until the fight is over," I said, hurriedly.

"Where is the cap'n?" I heard the men ask, as I left Gracia.

"He is here," I replied, with a blow of my cutlass upon a spear, which severed it like a reed.

As I spoke, half a dozen of the negroes threw themselves from the rail upon the deck, and struck right and left with their heavy clubs, and I was sorry to see, with some effect.

"Down with the black rascals!" I cried, avoiding a blow that was aimed at my head with excellent intentions. "Clear the deck of the black villains."

As I spoke I gave a quick stroke with my sword, and severed the right arm of one of our opponents close to his shoulder. The red blood spirted out, and with such force, that it was thrown several feet across the deck. Eight or ten of the negroes, who were standing on the rail, were so astonished at the sight, that they forgot to jump on deck and assist their companions.

We held our own and more; for somehow the giant negro and the Portuguese were no longer to be seen, and I did not even

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hear their voices encouraging the natives to fight, with their usual ferocity. I also missed Matthews, who I thought had deserted us in the hour of danger on account of his age; but in this respect I wronged the old man, for suddenly I heard his voice shouting, —

"Hit 'em on the shins, messmates; hit 'em on the shins."

The men gave a yell of delight, and changing the direction of their blows, let them fall with terrible force upon the niggers' feet and shins, said by those familiar with the anatomy of the colored man to be the most tender part of his body.

The effect was instantaneous. With cries of agony the blacks dropped their clubs, and commenced rubbing their shins, and shouting in their native language maledictions upon us. The men struck with such force that many feet were crushed instantly; and the panic which was experienced on deck was quickly communicated to those in the canoes, and I soon saw that no more natives attempted to board.

"Now, lads, for one more effort. Let us stave canoes alongside," I said.

The men caught up thirty-two-pound shot, which were lying along the plank shear, and sprang upon the bulwark.

"There's only one canoe here, sir," they cried.

I looked over, and saw that the small canoe was not alongside. I feared that the Portuguese and the giant negro had made their escape; and if they had, our triumph would be but a barren one. The natives were cowering in the bottom of the large canoe, and made signs that they were tired of fighting, and wanted to surrender.

"Sink 'em," shouted Matthews, levelling a gun, half a dozen of which he had brought from the store-room while I was wondering at his absence.

The men lifted the heavy masses of iron, and were about to let them fall and crash through the canoe, when at a word from me they stopped.

"Secure them," I said. "No more killing."

"But they tried to take the schooner, cap'n," murmured the men.

"And blowed if they don't deserve death," said Matthews.

"I know that," I replied.

"Then let's send 'em to Davy Jones's locker," some of the men exclaimed.

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"I know a trick worth two of that," I answered. "A live slave is better than a dead one."

"Hurrah! The captain forever!" shouted the men, who saw through my motive at once. "There's twenty-five of 'em not injured, and they are good for three hundred dollars each in Cuba. That's the way to make money."

"Jump down into the canoe and handcuff them," I said, "and shoot the ones who offer resistance."

Half a dozen muskets were pointed at the quailing negroes, and half a dozen of the men jumped into the canoe with handcuffs.

Just at that moment I heard a suppressed scream from the cabin, and I knew it to be Gracia's voice. I didn't stop to inquire if she had been frightened by a spider or a cockroach, but sprang from the rail on which I was standing, and ran towards the cabin, followed by Matthews. I entered, and saw the giant negro and Don Christo struggling with the lady. The Portuguese had one hand upon Gracia's mouth to prevent her screaming, and the negro had the lady in his arms, and was endeavoring to force her towards the cabin windows, under which a canoe was held by a negro, ready to receive the girl if the rascals succeeded in securing her.

The instant the two villains saw me they released Gracia, and she fell to the deck, fainting, overpowered by the unequal contest. The negro was the first to attack me, urged on by the rascally Portuguese. He sprang towards me, his face horribly distorted by passion; and I have no doubt could he have once clasped me in his arms my life would soon have terminated, for his strength was immense. But as he made a plunge for me, I stepped nimbly aside, and the negro dashed head first against the stomach of Matthews, who entered the cabin at that moment. Both went down, struggling.

But I had no time to attend to their battle, for even during the brief period in which my attention was attracted, the Portuguese had sought to take advantage of it. As I turned to pay my respects to him I saw he held a pistol in his hand, and that he was aiming at my heart. I had no time to remark more. There was a discharge, and I felt something cold pass along my skin, near the ribs; but I did not feel faint as though I was badly wounded. The touch of the lead acted on me like a spur, and seemed to inspire me with the strength of a dozen men. I sprang

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for the scamp; but he dropped his pistol and made a dive for the cabin windows, intending to regain his canoe and attempt an escape, for he surmised that his game was up. As he reached the transom I caught him with a blow of my cutlass upon his head that cut through hair and scalp, and inflicted a gash nearly six inches long. Down he fell, and made no further attempts to move. I preferred to save him for future vengeance, therefore did not repeat my blow.

In the mean time Matthews and the negro were having a rough and tumble fight; but I imagined the latter was getting the best of it, for I heard the mate shout, —

"No gouging, you black devil. A fair fight and no favor. Don't attempt to bite me, you cuss."

I soon terminated the combat; for I brought the back of my cutlass down upon the giant's head with such force that the blood spirted out in streams, and the strong grasp upon the mate's neck was instantly relinquished. Still the negro was not subdued, and was as full of fight as ever. He was endeavoring to gain his feet, and I was about to finish him, but Matthews shouted, —

"No, no, cap'n; don't kill the black rascal, 'cos he's as good as twelve hundred dollars in Cuba."

The words were hardly uttered before the crew poured into the cabin, and in spite of the giant's resistance secured him.

"I could have finished him with a fair fight," Matthews said, in explanation to the wondering crew, "but he's a leetle too tough for me in the rough and tumble."

"On deck with him," I said, "and take that black-hearted rascal also," pointing to the insensible Portuguese.

"We can't sell him, cap'n," said Matthews.

"I know it; but we can hang him."

"Well, that's some satisfaction, anyhow. I'll go on deck and see that the men secure the prisoners;" and Matthews left the cabin.

I raised the form of Gracia from the deck, and laid her in my state-room before the men entered the cabin to remove the Portuguese; but as soon as I was alone, returned to her I loved so well, and bathed her head with water, and under my treatment she soon revived and was able to speak. Then she acted like a girl of sense, and entirely different from the general run of heroines. First of all she put her arms around my neck and kissed me most affectionately, and then began to show me how chafed

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her arms were from the effects of the struggle with the two ruffians.

I recollected that the rascally Portuguese had fired a pistol, and that the bullet had hit me; but I told Gracia that I escaped with but a few scratches, and then, leaving her to that rest which she was so much entitled to, went to another state-room to find out how much I was injured, if at all. The ball had been aimed well enough, but it had struck a button in my vest pocket, and just grazed the skin below my breast, drawing but a few drops of blood. I felt thankful it was no worse, and then returned to the deck to see what I should do with my prisoners.

I found that the Portuguese and negro had revived, by the aid of several buckets of water which the men had thrown over them; but their escape was impossible, as they were secured to ring-bolts, with patent spring handcuffs of the best steel. The men were collected around them, and pouring the most bitter curses upon their heads; but as the parties interested did not understand English, perhaps it did not matter so much what the sailors said.

"What have you done with the rest of the prisoners?" I asked of Matthews.

"Put 'em under hatches with the slaves," was the reply.

"And the wounded ones?"

"Them 'ere fellers what hadn't got broken bones went to, but the others I've stowed in the canoe, and they is alongside."

I hardly knew what to do with them, for I did not like the idea of hanging the rascals, as they were not so much to blame as the leaders. I looked over the rail, and saw that they lay in the bottom of the large canoe, groaning most piteously, so felt some little sympathy for their misfortunes. I determined to set them on shore, and let them do the best they could towards making their way to the village, or else let those who could paddle take the canoe for that purpose. While I was thus in a merciful mood, Matthews came aft.

"That 'ere Portuguese rascal wants to have a little talk with you," he said.

"What does he desire?" I asked.

"Don't know, sir. Says that he won't open his jaw to any one but you, and that it is worth your while to speak to him for a minute."

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"The fellow wants to beg for his life," I said.

"I s'pose so. Sich cowards as he ginerally does. They gets men in awkward boxes, and then wants to crawl out themselves. That's the way wid 'em sure."

I determined to speak with the man, and hear what he had to say in extenuation of his crime. For this purpose I walked to the spot where the wretch was ironed to the deck, and as I approached, the sailors fell back.

"Go get your suppers, men," I said, "and leave me to talk with the prisoner."

"It's precious little talk he'd get out of me," said one of the men. "I'd hang him at the yard-arm as a scarecrow, afore two bells was passed."

"Ah, the blasted dog — he wanted to betray better men than himself," said a second sailor; a man whose face bore such a resemblance to a monkey, that he was called "Monkey Jack" on board.

With this parting salute the crew moved forward, and left me alone with Don Christo; and a hard-looking Don he was, with his face and body covered with blood, and his clothes torn by the rough handling of the men. His eyes had lost much of their brightness, but they looked as treacherous and snaky as ever.

"You wanted to speak with me," I said, sitting down on a spar, and addressing the wounded villain in Spanish.

"Yes, senor; I have something of importance to communicate," was the answer.

"With the expectation of purchasing your life, I suppose," I said.

"Perhaps, senor, you will think that what I relate is of more importance than my poor life."

"Perhaps," I answered, dryly.

"I should never have made the attempt I did, had I not been persuaded by the king," Don Christo exclaimed.

"Why by the king?"

"When I told him of the wonderful loveliness of your wife, he swore that he must possess her, and insisted that I should accompany him," the lying hypocrite cried.

"And why did you take the trouble to speak of my wife," I asked.

"Because the king was particular to know who was on board.

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He is fond of white women, and always ready to trade for one. He asked me if there was one on board, and when I told him there was, but could not be bought, he said that he would have her, even if he had to take the vessel."

"Granted that what you say is true, how is it to affect your life?" I asked.

"That you will soon see. The king is your prisoner, and you can take his life or save it," the Portuguese said.

I remained silent.

"Now don't you think that it would be better to save my life, if I can get the natives to pay a large sum for their king?" the Portuguese continued.

"Where can they get the money?" I asked, with more interest than I had shown.

"They have gold dust; every native has some. The king has two or three hundred pounds which his wives have collected. Save my life and I'll help you get possession of it."

"It seems that you are willing to arrange matters quite readily," I said.

"A man will do much for his life, senor," said the Portuguese, in an abject tone.

"I will not promise that your life shall be spared, but I am willing to return the king to his people for two hundred pounds weight of gold dust, and I want it on board by noon to-morrow."

"You shall have it, senor; and now let me send one of the wounded negroes on shore as a messenger."

"If you play us false," I said, "you shall not live one minute after it is discovered."

"I will be true, senor, for my life is in your hands," was the answer.

"At any rate you cannot harm us," I thought; and I judged that it was best to trust him, so a negro was despatched with a message to the village.

As soon as it was dark, I told Matthews to take a boat and go up the river as quietly as he could, and fill four or five small casks with water, and to hasten back as soon as possible. I also directed him to take six of the best men, with muskets, pistols, and cutlasses; but on no account to encounter the natives, if it was possible to avoid them. He was also ordered to notice the village, and note if he saw anything unusual going on there.

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The mate understood the job with great readiness, and in a few minutes had the gang-casks in the boat, and his men selected. Instead of using oars they took the paddles which were in the canoe alongside, and would make less noise than the oars; and then the boat pushed off, and was soon lost to view in the darkness that had settled upon the harbor of Mud Creek. I walked the deck, and awaited the return of the boat with much anxiety. Not that I believed that there was any danger in the expedition, but feared that the men might be imprudent and run into difficulties, with the characteristic imprudence of sailors.

I heard the paddles of the boat as it swept around the river's point, and headed for the schooner an hour afterwards.

"Have you got the water?" I asked, when the boat was twenty or thirty fathoms off.

"All right, sir," answered Matthews, from the stern-sheets.

The boat came alongside, and the mate joined me on deck.

"Did you have any trouble?" I asked.

"Not a bit, sir. The niggers are too much occupied with somethin' on shore to attend to the river. The village is all alive with niggers, and lighted up as though they were having a big powwow."

I thought it would account for the capture of the king, and that his subjects had formed themselves into a committee of the whole, for the purpose of raising the dust to secure his release.

"How is the water you have brought on board? Good and clear?"

"It is much better than I expected, and tastes sweet, although I think that a dash of rum would improve it. I ain't much of a water drinker, 'cos I think it was made for wimmen and children. If it had been intended for sailors to drink, I think that the ocean would have been fresh instead of salt."

I took the strong hint, and Matthews and his boat's crew received a stiff glass of grog, with many expressions of approval. We then hoisted the water on board, and I sent the boat back, with empty casks, for a further supply; and while the mate was absent I set an anchor watch, and went below, with orders to call me if anything turned up.

Gracia was sleeping soundly, and probably dreaming of home and its attractions. I did not disturb her, but threw myself upon the lounge, and slept without being awakened until daylight.

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Just as I reached the deck, I saw a canoe containing two negroes round the point, and paddle towards the vessel. When within half a cable's length they ceased paddling, and one of them raised a strip of white cloth, and waved it in the air, as a token of peace. I made motions for them to come alongside, and they timidly obeyed. One came on deck, and muttered some words in his native tongue; and to find out his meaning, I took him to the Portuguese, whose condition did not appear to excite much sympathy in the heart of the negro; and I strongly suspected that the latter was rather glad than otherwise at the humiliation of the parasite. For a few moments they talked together with much earnestness, and at length the Portuguese interpreted what the visitor said.

"The negroes will make up the two hundred pounds of gold dust, captain; but they are fearful that you won't keep your word, and release the king after you receive the dust."

"How shall I convince them?" I asked.

"I know of but one way," said the Portuguese, after a moment's thought.

"Name it."

"By letting me go on shore with them. That will show you are in earnest."

I saw the trick; the rascal wanted to get his neck out of a noose if possible, and imagined that the dust would blind me sufficiently to let him escape. But I had no idea of any such thing. He must have read my determination in my face, for he again spoke, —

"Of course, if I went on shore I should do all in my power to hurry the dust along, so that you can sail to-night."

"I shall sail to-night," I said, "whether the dust comes, or remains on shore."

"But you will not take me with you?" he asked.

"I shall not," I replied.

"Then I can go on shore with the natives now?" the Portuguese said, with renewed hope.

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I intend to hold you until the money is paid; and if it is not paid, the king goes to Cuba, and you to —"

"Where?" he asked, with anxiety.

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"To the yard-arm."

He sank back without another word, but his dark face paled at the thought of death. Anything but that. He would have submitted to the most degrading tasks rather than die. Thinking that I had made a suitable impression, I left him and the negro conversing together; and presently the latter went over the side, and paddled for the shore as though in a hurry.

We gave the fallen king a good breakfast, and his majesty was not so humiliated but that he could stow away two pounds of salt beef and a pound of ship bread without much trouble; and when the whole was washed down with a stiff glass of rum, the king was pleased to rub his stomach, and mutter "barracker," which, I suppose, was intended for good.

"What's going to be done with them 'ere marines?" asked Matthews, after the decks were washed down and swabbed dry.

"Make money out of one of them," I answered.

"I don't see how it can be done, unless we sell 'em," he answered.

"But I do."

The mate scratched his head, and said no more; but I saw that he could not help thinking.

By the time the sun was three hours high, I began to think the darkies were unable to raise the gold dust, and that they would find it much more to their advantage to elect another man to the position of king, instead of ransoming the one we held. But just as I had given up all hope, a large canoe containing two natives, appeared in sight, and paddled direct for the schooner. As soon as the canoe was alongside, I saw that the treasure had come; for it was lying on the bottom of the boat, secured in buckskin pouches, and there were ten of them.

"Jump into the canoe, two of you, and pass those bags up," I said.

The men stared, and manifested their astonishment.

"Be careful of them," I said, "for each one contains twenty pounds of gold dust."

"What is it for, sir?" asked Matthews.

"It is for all hands," I replied. "It is payment for the release of the king of Mud Creek."

"And do you mean to say, sir, that we is all to share that?" demanded Matthews, with some excitement.

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"Of course I do," I replied.

"Then," said Matthews, turning to the men, "I calls for three cheers for our cap'n, and may we always have as good a one."

He flung his hat in the air and roared like a bull, and the men followed suit, starting the alligators of Mud Creek from their slimy beds, and nearly frightening Gracia out of her wits.

Half a dozen of the men struggled for the honor of handing up the precious dust, but at length Matthews got the start and reached the canoe, commenced passing the dust up on deck, where it was felt of, and even smelt of by the men. I had it carried into the cabin, where I examined it carefully to see how much the natives had cheated; for they were not above such things, but, for a wonder, I found the dust quite free of sand and impurities. Then I weighed it, and found full two hundred pounds, and nothing was said about Troy weight either. I called the men aft, and said to them, —

"We have got two hundred pounds of gold dust for the negro king, and I need not tell you that it is worth in Havana about forty thousand dollars. The question is, do you feel like giving up the Portuguese as well as the king?"

"I s'pose no one would have any objection, if he come down putty handsome," Matthews said, with a sly wink.

He had got a taste for gold, and for a moment forgot the offences of the white rascal.

"Ah, that's the talk; let him come down with as much as the nigger, and he can go too," said the men.

"But suppose he cannot raise two hundred pounds?" I asked.

"Then, cuss him, hang him!" was the cry.

The men were like bulldogs, fierce for blood after once smelling it. I would have saved the Portuguese, but saw that such was the deadly hatred of the men it was impossible, unless he had wealth enough to purchase his life.

"Let us hang him now!" the men cried; and they made a rush towards the place where Don Christo was lying.

"Ah, up with him! Remember the white women he betrayed."

I do not believe but half of my men would have acted as he had done, but just at that moment they felt particularly virtuous, and desirous of showing how much they abhorred the Portuguese. Before they could lay violent hand upon their intended victim I was by his side.

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"Back, men," I said. "Would you commit murder?"

"Ah, that we will, unless the blasted rascal is given up to us," was the answer of one of the men, a great stout fellow whom I had noticed as not particularly active during the fight with the negroes.

He stooped as he spoke, as though about to proceed at all hazard against the prisoner. I pushed him back, but the fellow still pressed on, muttering, —

"The Portuguese shall die in spite of you. We'll have our say about it."

"Will you?" I said; and struck the man a blow between the eyes that felled him like an ox.

He staggered to his feet, and came towards me, his hands flying like jib-sheet blocks, when tacking ship during a strong breeze. The men stood one side for the purpose of showing fair play, and I saw that I was in for it, and had got to vindicate my authority by a knock-down fight. I was not so much adverse to it just at that time, as I otherwise should have been, for I knew that I was right. I therefore stood one side, when the man rushed at me like a bull; but as he was about passing me, I struck him a blow under his ear that sent him senseless to the deck, where he lay for a few minutes without any assistance.

"Is there any one else that would like to lay a hand upon this man?" I asked.

There was no reply. The men looked at each other in silence, as though somewhat astonished.

"Now, go forward," I said. "When it is time to talk about this man's dying, I will let you know."

The men obeyed, and went without a murmur.

"That's well done," said Matthews, rubbing his hands. "You astonished the men by your science. Of all things I like to see a gallant mill, but this one was all one way, and no chance to make up bets. Ah, when I was in Hingland what fights I've seen, and all conducted on the ring principle."

I was not particularly pleased with such praise, although I knew it was well enough intended. The character of a bruiser was one that I did not aspire to, but sometimes a well planted blow is worth a cargo of sermons, especially at sea.

But while we had been quarrelling, the negroes who brought the ransom on board, were impatient for the liberation of their

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king, and they looked as though fearful I intended to break faith with them. But such was not my intention. I went to the fallen monarch, removed his irons, and pointed to the shore; and he was glad enough to think he was free. As he stepped over the gangway, I spoke to the Portuguese. The king looked for a moment at him, then put his hand upon his own head where his wound was, and with a savage grin, entered the canoe and pushed off.

"Senor captain," cried the Portuguese, "has the king gone?"

"He has," I answered.

"For the sake of the saints let me speak one word to him. I can make him pay a ransom for me. He must do it. I have helped him many times, and he has gold dust enough. Let me speak with him only a word."

"Cast him loose from the ringbolt," I said; "I will give him a last chance."

Matthews obeyed, while the Portuguese staggered to the bulwarks, and shouted to the king in the language of the village. His majesty's attendants stopped rowing for a moment, while the sable king listened without manifesting the least feeling. Don Christo continued to plead, but at length the king laid his huge black hand upon the wound upon his head, as though to remind the Portuguese that it was there by his means. Then he spoke a word to his boatmen, and they recommenced paddling for the river.

"Cuss his black heart!" muttered the Portuguese; "if I had supposed he was so ungrateful, I would have murdered him long since."

The rascal glanced over the deck of the schooner, saw that no one was near him, and that no fire-arms were at hand.

"Senor captain," he asked, "if I remain on board shall I be punished?"

"You will," I replied.

"In what way?" he demanded.

"By hanging."

"No, by the saints, I will not stand that. I was born a gentleman, and I'll die like one. No cord shall choke the life out of me."

As he spoke he made a sudden spring, and reached the rail, where he stood for a second, and then with a bold plunge went overboard. He was so quick that there was no time to restrain him had I been so disposed.

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The men sprang to the rail, and some of them came tumbling aft to the boats, for the purpose of lowering them and picking the man up. But I stopped them, and sent them forward.

"Give him fair play," I said. "If he can reach the shore he is entitled to his liberty."

The men took their positions on the rail, and watched for the Portuguese to make his appearance upon the surface of the water. They knew that the harbor was full of alligators, and that the swimmer would find it difficult to avoid them. Therefore, when Don Christo showed his head he was greeted with a yell which made him strike out for the shore with lusty strokes; but upon looking over his shoulder and finding he was not pursued, and that no muskets were pointed at him, he slackened his exertions, and struck out with more moderate strokes for the point of land that concealed the mouth of the river. For two minutes the man swam on without interruption, and I began to think he would escape punishment after all; but suddenly three or four black heads appeared above the water, close to the swimmer, and then as suddenly disappeared.

"Steer to port!" shouted one of the crew, who had his sympathies aroused for the unfortunate. "Steer to port!" he continued, "or the alligators will make mince meat of you in no time."

Don Christo heard the words, but he did not understand their meaning. Therefore he kept on straight for the point, totally unconscious that the alligators were close aboard of him, and that they scented him like bloodhounds upon the land in pursuit of a negro.

Other heads now began to appear in different parts of the harbor, and then as suddenly disappear, but still the Portuguese was unmolested. If he could but get near enough to the land to touch bottom, I had no doubt but that he could splash the water and frighten his enemies away; and I must say that much as I disliked the man and his conduct, I hoped that such would be the case. But fate had no such good fortune in store for him, for there was a sudden rush of the black heads, a little agitation of the water, and with a loud yell the Portuguese disappeared from the surface and was seen no more. The many crimes which he had committed were fearfully avenged.

"Well," said Matthews, taking off his hat and looking in it as

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though searching for something that would give effect to his words, "I must say that the scamp is got rid of arter awhile, but it was only a dog's death arter all. He was a great rascal, but I don't think that I bear him any malice now that he's dead. Ah, it makes a man sick at his stomach to see sich things."

The old fellow was hinting for a glass of grog, and I had no objections to giving him one. The crew were called aft, and the main brace spliced in a most satisfactory manner.

That night, at sundown, I commenced preparations for our departure, for a gentle breeze was blowing off shore, and we had nothing to detain us longer in Mud Creek. We run a line out to a tree near the entrance of the harbor, and then warped the schooner out until the current favored us, and by the aid of sweeps cleared the narrow passage, and were enabled to make sail and shape our course for Cuba, where we arrived in due course of time, without meeting with any new adventure worth relating.

CHAPTER XIII.

CUBA ONCE MORE. — A NARROW ESCAPE. — IN PORT. — OUR AGENTS. — GRACIA'S HOME AND HER FATHER.

In looking over the late Captain Murphy's papers, I had found one from the agents at Havana, directing him, on his return voyage, to make the port of Castro de Lego, instead of Rijeo, as the former was not so much frequented by cruisers unfriendly to slavers. The letter stated that if we made the port in the night time, we were to hoist a red lantern and fire three rockets of different colors, and then wait for a boat to board us and receive instructions what to do. If we appeared off the port in the daytime, and there was no man-of-war in pursuit, we were to hoist the home flag at the fore with a pennant underneath, and wait until boarded.

We made the land before sundown, and just as a fisherman was setting sail for home. As I was entirely unacquainted with the harbor, I concluded to take one of the fishermen as a pilot,

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and for this purpose edged away to speak him, but the fellow was evidently a little suspicious of our black sides and immense spread of canvas, and as we kept away he did the same, until we were in full pursuit of the small craft. Our sailing qualities soon told on him, and we ranged alongside just as he was about to put his helm hard up, and jibe over to the opposite course from that which he was steering. Before he had time to do so, however, I hailed, and the sound of Spanish language reassured the three men who were on board.

"Run alongside," I said; "you have nothing to fear. We are honest slavers, and desire a pilot, and will pay liberally for what we want."

The skipper of the boat waved his hand, suddenly luffed up in time to catch a rope thrown from the schooner, and then shot alongside, and we continued on our course towards the land.

"Come on board, captain," I said to the gray-headed skipper who had charge of the fishing-boat. "Come on board, and get a drink of wine that will warm your heart, and make you thank the saints you fell in with us."

"Bueno, senor, I will accept of your hospitality in one instant. My sons here are not expert in the management of the boat, and unless I instruct them they will let her chafe against the side of the schooner."

His sons, two dark young fellows, with splendid eyes, only laughed at their father's anxiety, and did not seem in the least displeased by it. The Spaniard, after a sharp glance at the fenders, crawled over the rail in the most dignified manner, and landed upon our deck.

"Come, walk below," I said, "and you shall drink with me."

The old man's face brightened, and he followed me to the cabin, where Gracia was seated reading a book.

"The saints forgive me, captain," cried the old man, starting back and removing his sombrero from his grizzly head, "but I had no idea that you had an angel on board."

A woman likes to be called an angel, whether she has claims to the title or not. Therefore Gracia smiled and laid aside her book, and looked upon the old man with more interest than she otherwise would have done, had not a little flattery been acceptable.

"Ah, captain, you should be a happy man," said the pilot, as he poured out a glass of brandy; and, bowing to the lady, swallowed it.

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"Why so?"

"Because you have a handsome lady for your wife. I never saw but one who would equal her in attraction."

"And who was that?" asked Gracia, with a toss of her pretty head.

"Who but the daughter of Don Ingracia, of San Philippe. Ah, well do I remember her face. It was like the Madonna which I see Sunday mornings in the village church, when I confess my sins and listen to mass."

Gracia's face suddenly paled when she heard her father's name mentioned, and I must confess that I felt somewhat surprised.

"Do you know Don Ingracia?" I asked, after a moment's pause.

"I visit his plantation once a year, and I am always welcome," was the answer.

"When were you there last?" I asked.

"Let me see. It was one week since, when I carried to him a cargo of wine which I took from a French vessel. The Don is choice in his liquors, and likes not to have it passed through the customs, for fear the law will spoil its flavor."

"And the old gentleman was well?" I asked.

"He was far from being well, for he had heard bad news," said the pilot, emptying his glass and replenishing it.

Poor Gracia was so agitated that she could hardly restrain her tears. She motioned for me to continue the conversation, and I obeyed.

"Did he tell you the bad news he had received?" I asked.

"There was no need, for it was known all over the Plantation San Philippe, and great was the sorrow. By the mass, I could have cried my eyes out if I thought it would have done any good," was the hearty answer.

"But what was the occasion of the sorrow?" I asked.

"The loss of the Don's beautiful daughter at sea, while on her passage to Spain. She was the image of your wife, senor captain; so it's no wonder I was startled when I entered the cabin."

"And the Don is certain that his daughter is lost?" I asked.

"I should think so. When I was at the plantation, — it is only ten miles from the little port of Castro de Lego, — there were present two officers of the ship Virgin, on board of which the lady was a passenger."

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"And they brought the news?" I asked.

"The saints confound them, they did. They said that the first week from Havana they were driven from their course by a hurricane, and after thy got pleasant weather they began to make the best of their way for Cadiz; but one afternoon the ship was discovered to be on fire, and so rapidly did she burn that the crew had hardly time to lower the boats and shove off. At that time it was supposed the lady Gracia was in one of the boats, but after the ship blew up, with a thundering report, she was missed, and must have went down with the wreck. The officers said that the passengers were all on deck at the time the boats were lowered, and they can't account for the lady's being left behind."

The officers, I thought, must have told a pretty good story, for the Virgin was only on fire in her forward part when I boarded her and secured Gracia. I thought at the time, and I have thought since, that the vessel could have been saved, if the officers and crew had worked vigilantly and with proper discipline. I saw at once that the crew were desirous of making out a good story to the Don, for the purpose of shielding their own cowardly actions.

"And how were the rest of the passengers saved?" I asked.

"They were picked up by a vessel bound to Havana, and arrived safe. For two days they were in the boats, with only a drop of water and a buscuit to divide for each man. *Diable*, but they must have suffered some. But a Spaniard knows how to suffer, and bear with fortitude hunger and thirst;" and the old man took another pull at the bottle before him.

"Are the officers still at San Philippe?" I asked.

"Are they not? Does not the patron send for them once a day, and hear their story; and then shut himself up and cry until it is time for him to listen to more yarns."

Gracia covered her face with her hands, and sobbed as she thought of her father. I spoke a few words of consolation to her in English, but her agitation attracted the attention of the pilot.

"Captain, your wife is crying," he said.

"'Tis with sympathy for the unfortunate lady, who was so beautiful, and who died so young," I remarked.

"Ah, then the tears are holy, and should flow on, for the cause of them was the most beautiful virgin that the isle of Cuba could boast of. Her eyes were like stars; her hair was as wavy as the ocean; her teeth were like its pearls; her form was

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like that of Venus, and her breath was like the breeze from an orange grove in blossom.".

"Bravo, old man!" I cried, "the liquor has warmed your blood, and you grow enthusiastic and poetical. But take care. You will spoil my wife by your remarks."

"How so?"

"Why, did you not say that she was like the lost Gracia?"

"So I did; but this lady has eyes not quite as large, and is a few years older than the Gracia of San Philippe."

"Do you hear, darling," I said. "He has arrived at the conclusion that you are not so beautiful as the lost lady."

Gracia smiled, but remained silent.

"Yes, the lady is very beautiful, but it's no disparagement to say that she is not quite equal to the lady Gracia. Ah, she was very fair."

"And her father is very rich?" I asked.

"Ah, I should think he was," replied the pilot. "Ten thousand acres of land, and one thousand slaves to hoe his sugar and clear his plantations, are evidence of wealth few can boast of.

The old man left the cabin, for the steward entered to lay the cloth for supper, and went on deck.

I wished to prevent Don Ingracia from hearing of his daughter until such time as I was disposed to inform him, for I knew that if he should learn that she was on board the Coquette, that he would instantly demand her, and back his demand with all the force in the vicinity; and I was not disposed to be taken unawares, and have to fight my way to sea with slaves on board.

I made up my mind what to do instantly. I left the pilot taking the bearings of the highland, broad off our starboard bow, which overlooked the harbor of Castro de Lego, and walked forward amongst the men who were eating their supper.

"How does the fish go, boys?" I asked.

"Well, sir, it tastes a little better than old hoss," answered one of the men.

"We'll soon have somethin' better than fish," said one of the old salts, who was thinking of his liquor.

"I hope that you will," I replied; "but of one thing I wish to give you warning. You must not lisp a word to any one that we fell in with a burning vessel and took off a lady. If you do we shall lose some of the gold we have stored on board, for the

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owners will come in for a share. No matter how drunk you get, keep this in your thoughts."

This information made them look serious, and every man promised that not a word should be spoken regarding the burning vessel, excepting such as I might direct.

By the time we had finished supper it was nearly dark, and we repaired to the deck to smoke our cigars. The wind still held good, and we were rapidly nearing the land, beneath the shadow of which many eyes had been directed in the expectation that a cruiser might be lurking, ready to pounce upon us, and deprive us of our hard earned riches. But the coast was clear as far as we could see, and the men began to bet regarding the time we should drop anchor, and be safe from the searching eyes of Englishmen.

The night was delightfully clear overhead, with the heavens studded with stars, whose reflection in the water, as it rose and fell, seemed to make our course through fields of diamonds, all flashing a welcome at our approach. In company with Gracia, I leaned over the rail, and spoke to her in a low tone at the prospect of its being our last night at sea. From this I was aroused by the pilot, who seemed to think we were near enough to the harbor to make the signals, by which those on shore should know us, and come off with orders.

"Senor captain," said the pilot, "yonder is the harbor of Castro de Lego, nestled at the foot of the mountain which you see on our larboard side, like a child at its mother's feet. We are not more than one league from the anchorage, and if you wish to make signals, now is the time, for, unless there is a fandango in town, the people retire early. We will haul upon the wind and wait, if you are disposed to say the word, or I can pick out a soft spot for the mud-hook, and in fifteen minutes it will be down."

"And supposing that when we opened our eyes in the morning, we should find ourselves under the guns of an English frigate?" I asked.

"Ah, but that would be awkward and embarrassing to be sure, and there would be no chance to run for it. We will shorten sail, then, and heave to. For the Spaniards say that it is better to be certain than uncertain in love and in war."

Sail was reduced in a moment, and the schooner luffed up and the jib drawn to the windward.

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Up went a rocket, sending sparks through the air, which glittered for a moment, like a shower of shooting stars, and then disappeared from view. A second and third followed, and then we waited with patience for a response from the shore; but an hour passed, and no boat appeared to direct us what to do.

"Perhaps we had better edge in towards the harbor," said the pilot, at length. "Black clouds are rising in the south'ard, and I should not be surprised if we caught a squall before the midnight watch. Besides, who knows but some rascally Englishman is poking his nose along the coast, and may have seen our rockets?"

The weather did look threatening. The black clouds had arisen with a suddenness peculiar to the tropics, and already long flashes of lightning were to be seen darting through the heavens, as though charged with messages for the wind to concentrate at one point, and have a frolic at the expense of the shipping to be found at sea.

We edged away towards the mouth of the harbor, running under easy sail — the jib and mainsail; but before we had sailed a cable's length a gust of wind overtook us, and a crash of thunder burst overhead, loud enough to have answered for the report of a three decker's broadside.

"With the rain will come the wind," muttered the old pilot. "We had better make for the port, or we shall find ourselves jammed on a lee shore, and no chance to get off."

The weather grew more threatening every moment. Huge masses of angry-looking black clouds were gathering astern, and the wind began to sigh through the rigging, and the rain fell in large drops — an assurance of what was to come.

"What shall I do?" asked the pilot. "We are going to have a squall, and perhaps a hurricane. In an hour's time the shore will be lashed by a surf that wood and iron cannot withstand, even for a moment. We might work off, but the chances are against us. If we mean to make for the harbor we have none too much time, for it is fast being shut in. I'm ready to obey orders, although I'm not ready to die."

I did not hesitate a moment longer. The safety of Gracia was too great a consideration for me to delay.

"Take us in if you can," I said, "and remember that not one ounce, but a dozen, shall be your reward."

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"The saints have me in their keeping, senor; and if good St. Antonio will but befriend me, the money will be mine."

As he spoke the squall struck the schooner, but we were well prepared for it under a balance reefed mainsail and the bonnet off the jib. Still the wind was sufficient to nearly lift the schooner out of the water, and send her bounding towards the land at the rate of ten knots per hour.

"Get the men mustered," I said to Matthews, who stood near me on the quarter-deck, holding on by a back-stay, "and station them so that we can douse all sail immediately. See the anchors and chains clear, and ready for a run, for we shall bring up suddenly."

The mate worked his way along the deck and mustered the crew, who were clustering around the windlass, all their fond hopes and anticipations suddenly dashed by the force and violence of the gale and the uncertainty of their fate.

Two of the best seamen on board of the schooner were stationed at the wheel, with orders to keep the vessel east by north, and steer small. The wind increased to such an extent that we were soon compelled to run under bare poles, and if we had shown a stitch of canvas it would have been blown from the bolt ropes.

The Coquette steered like a pilot boat, and as she rose on the swells which were rushing towards the coast, she would bow her head, and seem to be plunging to the bottom with all possible despatch; but the next moment she would shake the water from her decks and rise like a duck, ready for a fresh encounter.

Suddenly the waves, instead of rolling regularly towards the shore, began to boil and bubble as though we had struck half a dozen cross currents, each one of which was striving for the supremacy. The water was lashed to a foam, and surged high above our decks, at times falling upon them with a crash that made the Coquette tremble from truck to keelson, and caused the negroes to howl with renewed violence.

The pilot put his head close to mine, and shouted,—

"A few seconds more and we shall be safe, or food for fishes."

I made no reply, but awaited the shock that was to consign us to eternity, with considerable composure. I had made up my mind to seek Gracia the instant the vessel struck, and die with her in my arms; but the saints be praised, I was not called upon for such a display of love, for the waves which but a moment

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before were so troubled, suddenly became calm, and even the wind abated some of its violence.

"Port your helm a little!" shouted the pilot to the men at the wheel.

"Port it is, sir," answered the men.

The schooner obeyed the helm quickly, although under no sail. For a few moments we run along, the water growing smoother each second, and had it not been for the darkness, rain, and thunder and lightning, I should hardly have believed that a few minutes before we were in the midst of a hurricane.

"Eh, captain," said the pilot, "you and your vessel are safe, but it was a narrow chance."

An anchor was dropped, and forty-five fathoms of chain payed out, and soon the Coquette swung round stern on to the town, which seemed deserted, for not a light was to be seen. The men rolled up the sails in silence. They were so thankful at their wonderful escape from death, that they could only express it in that manner.

Before daylight the next morning I was on deck, and found the air soft and balmy, and a gentle breeze blowing from the shore. We were anchored about two cable lengths from the land, and if we had had daylight could not have chosen a more advantageous spot, either for receiving or landing a cargo. Matthews was on deck, and had been there all night.

"A narrow squeak of it last night, sir," said Matthews. "I thought at one time that we was goners, and I would have sold out my stock in the cargo and share of fun in this world at a low figure."

While Matthews was speaking I observed a boat, manned by two men, and a passenger in the stern-sheets, shove off from the pier, and row towards us. The boat came alongside, and over the rail jumped a young, and good-looking Spaniard, whom I did not recognize at first, owing to his straw hat being slouched over his eyes.

"Where's Captain Murphy?" the visitor asked of Matthews, who received him.

"Well, I expect that he's dead and buried on the Gabun," was the reply, in an indifferent tone.

"Where's Mr. Robert?" the stranger asked, eagerly.

Then I knew who our visitor was.

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"Francisco!" I exclaimed, going up to my old Havana friend, and seizing his hand; and as I did so caught sight of the diamond ring which I had given him when we parted. He had promised me always to wear it, and I was gratified to think he had kept his word.

For a moment he was too much pleased to speak to me, and could only shake my hand, and look into my face with humid eyes.

"And is it possible that Murphy is dead, and you have command of the schooner?" Francisco asked.

"It is true," I replied.

"My dear friend," he said, "I congratulate you. Your fortune is now made sure, and a bright prospect is before you. I truly rejoice at your good luck. But tell me of another. Where is the sweet Isadora?"

"She, too, is dead," I replied, mournfully; for I still felt some pangs of remorse at my treatment of the poor girl.

"The saints protect me, but death has been busy on board. Tell me how it happened?"

I took my friend one side, and told him of the violent death of Murphy at the hands of the men, and of Isadora by fever.

"Now tell me how you came in this part of the island?" I asked.

"Nothing more simple. Our regular landing agent is sick, and the Havana house sent me here a week ago to look out for you."

"And a bright look out you must have kept," I replied, laughing. "I hove to, off the port, last evening, and sent up three as bright rockets as can be found in Havana, but no agent made his appearance. Possibly he was whispering to some dark-eyed senorita a tale of eternal constancy."

"By the saints, no," replied Francisco, laughing. "I saw your signals, and was about starting to board you, when the boatmen pointed to a black cloud which was rapidly rising to the windward, and said the squall looked threatening, and that I had better wait. Faith I did wait, and the slight squall proved to be a hurricane, and did not abate until long past midnight. Now, then, let us talk of business. How many negroes have you on board?"

"Four hundred and odd," I replied.

"And how many have died on the passage?"

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"Not over twenty."

"Are they well and likely?"

"You can hear the rogues grumbling for their breakfast. That is a good sign, I take it."

"Capital. Now, how much did you pay for them per head?"

Francisco wrote my answers down in his memorandum book.

"For four hundred and fifty I paid at the rate of twenty dollars in trade, which would be equal to ten dollars in cash. For twenty-five I paid nothing."

"How?"

"I mean that two canoe-loads of natives, led on by a Portuguese, made an attempt to take the schooner, but instead of doing so, got taken themselves. We picked out the sound ones, and set the wounded on shore. The rascals we have on board flourished amazingly well, for not one of them has died."

"My dear friend," exclaimed Francisco, "I congratulate you most sincerely, for you know that the agents only demand one third of what negroes are worth when captured in such a manner. One third goes to the commander, and the other third to the men."

"I knew nothing of such a law or custom," I replied.

"Then it is very fortunate that I am on the ground to give you the information, for some houses would have cheated you most shamefully. But what other piece of good luck has befallen you?"

Just as he spoke, who should leave the cabin but Gracia! At sight of her beautiful face the Spaniard, with an expression of surprise, removed his hat and bowed low, as though paying tribute to a saint.

I enjoyed the astonishment of Francisco for a moment without speaking.

"Gracia," I said, at length, "this is the gentleman whom you have heard me speak of so many times. It is my friend Francisco."

Again did the Spaniard bow low in acknowldgment of her slight nod; and then the lady, seeing that we were discussing business matters, turned away and walked aft. Francisco followed her with his eyes, and could restrain his curiosity no longer.

"Tell me," he cried, "who that angel is, for never did I see a woman so lovely."

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"Do you remember the ship Virgin, which left Havana some months since for Spain?" I asked.

"Of course I do. She carried as passengers some of the most distinguished families of Cuba, and among them was the only child of Don Ingracia of San Filipe."

"My dear friend," I said, "I pledge you my word that the lady you just bowed to is an exact picture of Don Ingracia's daughter."

"How — have you seen her, then?"

"In fact I am looking at her now," I replied, with a smile at Gracia, which she repaid with interest.

"My friend," said Francisco, quite gravely, "I fear that the storm of last night has turned your head, or you think that it is All Fools' Day. Go below and sleep, and I'll look after the vessel until you feel better."

"I never joke with my friends," I replied, so gravely that Francisco was staggered. "You have seen me at times when to joke was death, and I have not changed."

Francisco was silent.

"I told you seriously that I was looking at the lady Gracia Ingracia, and I repeat the statement. The lady you see on board is the daughter of Don Ingracia of San Filipe."

"And how in the name of the saints did she happen to be on board, when report says she was burned on board of the Virgin? The officers of the ship say so."

"Then the officers of the ship tell most outrageous lies to screen their cowardly conduct," I replied.

"Prove it," said Francisco, promptly, somewhat sensitive at the reflection cast upon his countrymen.

I gave him an account of the manner in which I had rescued Gracia from the burning ship.

"And the gold?" asked Francisco. "How much is there?"

"According to the bills found with the treasure, about three hundred thousand dollars."

"*Diablo*, but you are lucky," muttered Francisco. "Such luck does not happen often, and you must make the most of it. I am glad to congratulate you on your good fortune. Yes," he continued, "this can be called the best voyage that was ever made to Cuba. A few more like it, and we can call you a millionaire."

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"Then I am likely to remain without that enviable title," I remarked, "for this is the last trip for slaves I shall make."

"What! throw away all your golden chances?"

"Yes, as far as the slave trade is concerned."

"But what will the agents say?"

"I do not know, and shall not care much. I have other thoughts, and other aspirations."

"Ah, I see. The lady has weaned you from the thoughts of profits to more pleasing emotions," Francisco said, after a moment's pause; and then continued, "I do not blame you, but you have a different course before you if you hope to succeed, but that you will ultimately win I have no doubt. It will be characteristic of the American character. I must help you here with my poor abilities, and perhaps I can be of some use to you. Who knows?"

"Whatever help you can give me I shall appreciate," I said.

"I know it — I know it. But we will talk of this matter another time. Now we must go to work and land the slaves as fast as possible, for it would not do to have an English man-of-war poke its nose in the harbor just at this time."

"Who takes the slaves?" I asked.

"Your intended father-in-law has purchased two hundred, and his neighbor, Don Enrique, the balance. Ah, here come the launches to remove the fat fellows, and yonder is the escort to drive the slaves to the plantation, where they will be taught civilization and the art of cultivating sugar."

A dozen mounted men appeared upon a small knoll that overlooked the town, and waved a handkerchief.

"That means the coast is clear, and we may get to work at once. If you will set the men getting up the slaves, I will write a letter to the agents, and send it off by a special courier. He will reach Havana this evening, and be back to-morrow night."

By twelve o'clock every slave was landed and on their way to the plantation where they were to spend their lives, and become civilized, according to the Spanish idea of such things; and as soon as they were out of the way, the slave deck and all the unnecessary lumber on board were also sent on shore, and safely stowed away until again wanted.

A bag of doubloons was sent to the head of the government with the respects of the agent, and after the governor was satis-

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fied it was easy to propitiate the favor of the members of the the council; no one objected if a thousand slaves were landed in dayliglit, and in the heart of a populous town.

The house which owned the Coquette was the most wealthy and respectable in Havana. The senior members of the firm had been engaged in the trade for many years, and fortune had favored them beyond all precedent. They knew to an ounce how much a man could be bought for, from the governor general down to the meanest officer in the custom-house. Hence there was never any trouble when one of their vessels arrived. Everything was made right at once, and no unnecessary delay ensued.

As soon as the lumber was landed, half a dozen of the best and most trustworthy men were employed to remove the boxes of treasure on shore and carry them to the custom-house; while the rest of the crew were set at work scrubbing the hold, and endeavoring by means of lime and lime-water to eradicate the stench, which is one of the unpleasant features connected with the slave traffic.

The treasure was safely housed and locked up in a huge vault, which was once used to secure the government money and papers, when Castro de Lego was a port of some importance; and to insure the safety of the money a guard of six soldiers was stationed in front of the vault to watch it night and day, and for this service the captain of the port received twenty-five ounces; and grateful enough he was for them, for it was the first bribe he had received for many months.

In the mean time Francisco had sent off his despatch by an official courier, who had orders not to spare horse-flesh until the letter was safe in the hands of the senior member of the firm of Riejo & Neli, of Havana; and, until an answer was received, we had nothing to do but enjoy ourselves the best way we could. Next evening Francisco came on board highly elated.

"I've received a despatch," he cried, "and the house is delighted with your conduct. You are to send the men to Havana for their pay, and go yourself when it suits your convenience. The vessel is under your charge until you resign the command, but this the house won't listen to. To-morrow we can leave for the plantation of San Filipe."

But the news was not pleasant to Gracia or myself, for we dreaded to meet Don Ingracia.

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The next morning I collected all the men, and packed them, bag and baggage, on board a fisherman, and sent them to Havana, each one bearing a small slip of paper, stating the number of days that he had been on board, and whether his conduct was such as entitled him to receive full pay for the trip. As for Matthews, he preferred to remain on board of the schooner, and take charge of her until I had decided what to do. He had grown penurious all of a sudden, and determined to save what he could to support himself in his old age. To keep him company I hired the pilot and his two sons to stop on board the vessel, and glad enough they were of the chance.

"Now," said Francisco, "if you have completed your arrangements we will start on our important business. I have hired the only vehicle in town to take you and the lady, while I will mount a horse."

Gracia was all dressed and ready, although nervous at the thought of meeting her father. We entered a boat, and were pulled on shore, and at the landing found an antique-looking carriage, with one seat, two wheels, and a postilion, who, with jack-boots and short whip, was mounted on one of the animals, and leisurely smoking a cigar.

Francisco entertained us with anecdotes regarding the country through which we were travelling, until at length we gained the broad lands of Don Ingracia, through which we passed for an hour, with gangs of negroes at work in sugar fields and coffee groves.

"La casa, senor," shouted the postilion, with a crack of his whip, pointing to a large mansion which could be seen through the foliage that surrounded it.

The house was painted white, and surrounded by piazzas. It was only one and a half stories high, but covered nearly half an acre with its additions, which had been built on to suit the convenience of the owner. In front was a large flower garden, where the choicest kinds of flowers were flourishing in all the glory of tints which a tropical sun could give them. We turned up a winding road, shaded by stately pines, and after a drive of a few minutes stopped before the door of Don Ingracia's mansion, where three or four slaves were standing as though ready to receive company.

"Is Don Ingracia at home?" asked Francisco of the negro who appeared to have charge of the front part of the house.

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"He is at home, but can't be seen, senor," was the reply.

"How do you know that such is the case?" demanded Francisco, sharply.

"Because, senor, he has given orders that only two persons shall be admitted to his presence," replied the negro, somewhat awed by the sharpness of my friend's tone.

"We have come a long distance to see the Don on business, and we'll not leave until our errand is accomplished," cried Francisco, dismounting, an example that Gracia and myself were not slow to follow; and although our boldness made the negroes stare, they did not utter a word in remonstrance.

"Drive the horses to the stable, and feed them," said Francisco.

One of the negroes touched a bell for the stable servants to make their appearance, and then stood staring at us as though anxious to know what our next order would be. Gracia was so closely veiled that her face could not be seen. Just at that moment two men, whom I knew to be seamen by their sunburnt faces, hove in sight, and came rolling towards the door as though they were the lords of the house and lands adjoining. The slaves became wonderfully attentive in an instant, and removed their straw hats with the utmost mark of respect.

"Senors Pedro and Antonio," cried the head slave, "the Don Ingracia has asked for you, and is now awaiting your arrival."

"Ah, is he?" was the indifferent reply. "Well, we must go and see him."

"Robert," whispered Gracia, "those two men were officers on board of the Virgin."

"Ah, indeed. Then we will soon put them to flight, and they will leave with more haste than they did when the ship was on fire. Wait with patience, my dear."

"But I have no patience when I see such wretches received with honor, and you and your friend treated with coldness."

I smiled and pressed her hand.

"Shall I tell the Don you will immediately wait upon him, senors," asked the negro, addressing the seamen.

"Yes; you heave ahead, and we'll follow you," was the reply; and the two officers, after casting an inquiring glance upon our party, prepared to follow the slave into the presence of Gracia's father, and once more repeat the tale of their desperate attempts to save his child.

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"Wait one moment," cried Francisco, in a commanding tone to the slave, and the fellow paused instantly. "Tell your master that two gentlemen, strangers to him, but who will prove themselves friends, wish to see him without delay on business which will interest him much. See that you deliver the message, or the worse for you. Now show us a room where we can wait a reply."

The negro bowed low. He began to have suspicion that we might be government officials on a tour of inspection. He opened a door that led into a reception-room, bowed us in, and then left us to pilot the officers to Don Ingracia's presence. He was gone about ten minutes, when he returned.

"The Don wishes to know if your business is of importance?" the negro asked.

"That will depend upon himself," I answered.

"Then, senors, he desires me to say that he will waive his usual custom of seeing only his immediate friends, and speak to you. Will you follow me?"

Francisco and myself arose and followed the slave through numerous broad corridors, until we arrived at the back part of the house, when the man opened a door and bowed us into a library with several book-cases of richly carved mahogany and a number of pictures, painted by no common hands. I but briefly glanced at these things, for my attention was directed to Don Ingracia, who was seated at a desk, but arose when we entered, and bowed with the politeness and coldness of a grandee of Spain.

The Spaniard was a man about sixty years of age, tall and slim, with hair which was white as snow, and curled about his neck as though the owner was proud of its luxuriant growth.

"Senors," he said, with a slight and stately bow, "I have been told you have important business with me. I have broken through a rule which I established, for the purpose of granting you an interview. It should be something important to thus seek me while I am mourning for a daughter."

"We do wish to speak with you on matters of importance," I replied. "But what we have to say must be spoken to you alone."

I looked, as I spoke, to the two seamen, Antonio and Pedro, who were in the room, and who seemed to be quite at home from appearances.

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"In a few minutes I shall be at leisure, senor," the Don replied. "Pray be seated while I ask these brave gentlemen a few questions regarding my poor child, whose fate I presume you are familiar with."

We bowed, and took seats as we were directed, and waited to hear the lies which the fellows should spread before the old gentleman.

"Well, as I was saying," cried Pedro, who seemed to be the superior officer, "I smelt smoke about six bells in the afternoon, and I wondered where it came from."

"I recollect the afternoon well," chimed in Antonio. "I know you told me that you suspected the ship was on fire, and we must be cautious how we acted."

"But why did you not commence a search for the fire without delay?" asked Don Ingracia.

"Because, you see, we did not wish to alarm the passengers," was the unsatisfactory answer.

"But you might have proceeded to work very quietly," the Don remarked.

"No, we couldn't. Every action was watched; the passengers always surrounded us, and asked about the voyage. You know that, Antonio."

"Of course I do. If we had left the quarter-deck, a dozen would have followed us. Go on with your yarn."

"Well, presently the smoke came out of the fore hatch, and the crew rushed on deck, and swore that the ship was on fire between decks. The passengers were all seized with a panic, and wouldn't listen to advice. The captain told us to lower the boats at once."

"What! without first seeing if the fire could not be extinguished?" I asked.

Pedro and Antonio turned around their chairs to have a look at me. Probably the survey was not satisfactory, for they immediately turned to the Don.

"You do not answer the senor's question," remarked Don Ingracia, quite calmly.

"Because, senor, we are here to answer your questions, and not those put by strangers."

"Then consider that I put the same question," the Don said.

"Well, then I shall answer it. On shipboard a fire spreads quick. A moment it is here, and lo! *presto*, it is there. No

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time is to be lost. The men are crazy with fright, and the passengers frantic to be saved. To be sure Antonio and myself were cool as we are at this moment, but we could not do everything."

"Of course not," muttered Antonio.

"We got the boats into the water, and threw into them a few articles, such as we should need. The men jumped in, and then the passengers, and we shoved off to get out of reach of the ship, in case she should blow up, of which there was some danger."

"But where was my child all of this time?" asked the Don, with tearful eyes and trembling lips.

"I'm coming to her in a moment," said the fellow, stopping to collect his thoughts. "Well, after we had shoved off I missed the lady Gracia. She was not in my boat."

"And she wasn't in mine," muttered Antonio.

"I said," continued Pedro, "'Where is the lady Gracia? Pass the word for the lady Gracia.' Word was passed, but she was not to be found."

Don Ingracia bowed his head upon his hands, and wept. The coward and liar continued, —

"I said she must have been left on board by accident. We will not leave her."

"His very words," Antonio remarked.

"I said, 'Antonio, will you go back with me, and help find her?'"

"And I said that I would," Antonio remarked.

"You did," continued Pedro. "The men swore they would not lift an oar to pull back."

"The cowards! O, the cowards!" cried Don Ingracia.

"Ah, I should think so," the fellow continued; "but Antonio and myself were not to be intimidated by such things. We drew our pistols, and swore that, unless the boats were rowed back to the Virgin, we would shoot every man who refused to go."

"Brave men! worthy friends!" cried Don Ingracia, raising his hands as though invoking the blessing of Heaven upon their heads.

"Well, every one would not have done as we did," cried Pedro, with the utmost complacency. "We endangered our lives, but your child was on board, and we determined to save her."

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"Why didn't you, then?" I asked, unable to keep silent any longer.

Pedro started to his feet with an oath and swagger of defiance, while the Don looked astonished and amazed.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFOUNDING LIARS. — FATHER AND DAUGHTER. — A HAPPY REUNION. — LIFE ON A CUBIAN PLANTATION.

"DON INGRACIA," said the ruffian, who was half drunk, "if we are to be interrupted in this manner, by a fellow who don't know a ship from a volante, I shall decline to say any more at present."

"I trust," remarked Don Ingracia, "that my friends here will be allowed to continue their remarks without any further interruption. I desire it."

The old man drew himself up as he spoke, as though he was in the habit of being obeyed when he made a request.

"For Heaven's sake let the dog finish," whispered Francisco. "The game will be in your hands in a few minutes."

I bowed to the Don; and thus appeased, the braggart continued, —

"We made the men pull the boats up under the ship's chains, although the fire was raging violently, and in the vicinity of the magazine. Every moment I expected to be blown to the devil, and some of the men were white with fear. But Antonio and myself encouraged them, and told them there was no danger, and by this means we kept them quiet."

"Ah, that we did," muttered Antonio.

"I shouted for your daughter, Gracia, but received no answer. I climbed up into the chains, and left Antonio to keep the men quiet, and prevent them from running off in my absence. I reached the deck, but still did not see her. I managed to gain the cabin, but here a wall of fire drove me back. I shouted for your daughter, and at last got an answer. She was lying on the

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deck, surrounded by fire, and just capable of speaking. She told me to seek out her father, and say that she died blessing him. Then she expired, and I made the best of my way to the boat, and we pushed off; but before we were two cable lengths from the ship, she blew up."

"Alas, my poor child!" cried Don Ingracia, his head falling upon the desk before him. "To think she should have died such a terrible death, and her father miles from her!"

"It ain't any fault of mine, you know," said Pedro. "We did all we could to save her."

"I have no doubt of it," the old Spaniard cried. "I do not blame you or your companion, and before many days you shall see an evidence of my good will. Leave me now," continued the Don, "and I will speak with you again to-morrow."

The men arose to take their leave, and I could see them wink at each other as they did so. I could restrain my indignation no longer. I determined to unmask them at all hazards.

"Don Ingracia," I said, motioning to the two men to remain in the room, "I wish to ask a few questions, if these sailors have no objections to answering them."

"Some other time, senor," replied the Spaniard, raising his head. "I cannot listen to-day."

"But this is something that concerns your child, in whose fate I am deeply interested," I replied.

The Don looked astonished, and made no reply.

"We can answer all the questions he puts to us," one sailor said, with a sneer. "Let him go ahead."

"Are you quite sure you laid by the ship until she blew up?" I asked.

The men smiled.

"Answer the senor," cried the Don, in a tone so stern I should not have recognized the voice as belonging to him, if I had not seen him speak.

"We are sure," replied the men.

"Are you sure that the ship was all on fire when you left her?" I asked.

"May the saints pardon me, senor, but to what does your question tend?" the Don inquired, fixing his burning glances upon me.

"Much that interests you, senor. Shall I go on?"

"Go on," was the answer.

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"At the time you abandoned the Virgin, was there any other vessel in sight?" I continued.

"There was not," answered Pedro, who began to look troubled.

"Did you scan the horizon?" I asked.

"We had no time, for every man was busy in lowering the boats," was the answer.

"One more question. Did you really make an attempt to rescue the daughter of Don Ingracia?"

"I have answered you that I did. If you have more questions, I wish you would ask them outside, so I can reply as a gentleman."

The fellow began to show signs of impatience, and thought he could frighten me from my purpose by intimidation. I merely laughed, and turned to Don Ingracia.

"You have heard these men, day after day, give an imaginary account of the loss of your daughter," I said. "I now wish to prove to you that what they have uttered are lies, from beginning to end."

"You shall answer for this," shouted Pedro.

"And to me, too," cried Antonio.

"I will meet both of you if you are disposed, after this business is settled," I remarked. "Don Ingracia, I have some astonishing news for you. Can you bear it?"

The old gentleman sat looking at me as though he was made of bronze. It was evident that he hardly dared to hope what the nature of my communication would be. He nodded his head, and gazed at me with anxious eyes.

"A few months since," I commenced, "I was on the deck of a schooner which had left Havana but a short time before. It was night, and I saw a light a few miles off our larboard bow. We ran for it, and found it was a burning ship. I took a boat and crew, and started for the vessel, thinking some one might be left on board."

"You did find some one?" demanded Don Ingracia, trembling with eagerness.

"I did," I replied.

"And alive?—O, say that she was alive!" the Don cried, starting to his feet and clasping his hands.

"She was alive when I found her, but in a senseless condition," I continued.

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The two officers here turned towards the door, as though they would leave the room.

"I beg of you to remain," I said. "I have much to say that interests you."

They paused irresolute.

Don Ingracia touched a spring, and a draw of the table, at which he sat, opened. He took out two handsome pistols, cocked them, and laid them before him.

"The man who leaves this room without my permission dies," he said; and I could see by his eyes that he was in earnest.

The two officers remained, and Don Ingracia motioned me to go on.

"My men," I continued, "after they reached the vessel,—which we found on fire only in the fore part,—began to search for something to carry off that was valuable. I also explored the cabin to see if any one alive was on board. In one of the state-rooms, lying on the deck in an insensible condition, I found a lady."

"The name of the vessel?" cried the Don, with intense eagerness.

"The Virgin, of Havana, bound for Cadiz," I replied.

"O, miserable liars that you are!" exclaimed the old gentleman to the two officers, his hands in close proximity to his pistols, as though he longed to use them. "Go on, senor," he said at length, with a mighty effort to control his rage, and a savage glance at the sailors, who did not dare meet his eye.

"I bore the lady to the deck, and bathed her face with water, and forced some down her throat. She slowly revived, and thanked me like one raised from the dead. She told me that the ship was discovered on fire in the afternoon, and that all hands instantly took to the boats, without one effort to save the vessel. She had gone to her state-room for a cloak, and while there the boats had shoved off without her."

"O, wretched cowards—O, miserable rascals!" cried the Don. "But I'll punish you."

He touched a bell, and a servant appeared.

"Collect the people," he said, "and let them wait outside for orders."

The negro bowed, and disappeared.

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The officers of the Virgin exchanged looks. They began to realize that their position was not a pleasant one.

"We shall see some fun yet," muttered Francisco in my ear. "The old gentleman has got the temper of an Ashantee, and he will show some of it before long."

"Continue your narrative," cried the Don, with a gracious look towards me.

"When the lady, who is as good as she is beautiful, realized that she was deserted, she again retired to her state-room, and shed many tears at the prospect of her miserable fate; and, as she was a pious maid, she offered up many prayers for her soul, and the happiness of her dear father, whom she had left in Cuba."

The Spaniard groaned, and once more moved his hand in the direction of his pistols. But he resisted the temptation, much to the satisfaction of the two officers, who were watching his motions keenly.

"When the smoke commenced pouring into the state-room, the lady attempted to reach the deck, but was unable to do so, and knew nothing more until she found a stranger bathing her head."

Don Ingracia followed me in my narrative, and did not lose a word. He was fearfully interested, yet did not dare to ask me the all-important question relative to her safety. He nodded for me to continue my story.

"I carried the lady on board of the schooner to which I belonged, but found that I had only rescued her from death for a life of lingering torture, if the plans which were formed in her behalf were carried out. I was determined to defeat the men who considered their pecuniary interest paramount to all others."

"You did so?" asked Don Ingracia, eagerly.

"You shall hear. The master of the vessel made a proposition that we should sell the lady to the king of the Gabun for one hundred negroes, and share the profits. The second mate proposed to marry her. Both men were bold and unscrupulous, and it was necessary that I should act with great caution. I temporized with the master, and pitted the second mate against him, until it was time to throw off the mask, when I refused to dispose of the lady, or to allow the second mate to marry her. I claimed her as my prize, and expressed a determination to protect her with my life."

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"Brave young man!" muttered the Don. "How different your conduct from that of those two rascals!"

The two rascals alluded to didn't look happy by any means.

"A rupture took place between the captain and myself," I continued, "but still I swore to protect the lady from insult with my life. I was surrounded by rude, lawless men, who cared for no one unless he made himself respected by means of a heavy hand. Luckily for my object, a quarrel ensued between the men and the master, and while it continued I espoused the side of the men, and by that means won their confidence. The master, during an affray, was killed, and I took charge of the vessel. I pointed out to the men the reward of obedience to orders, and they were sensible enough to see that I was right. We completed our cargo and sailed for Cuba, and by careful watching I was enabled to bring the lady with me, safe and well."

"Where is she now?" asked Don Ingracia, starting to his feet.

"Is the senor composed sufficient for an interview?" I remarked.

"Composed! Am I not composed? Look at me. These eyes have shed many tears for the loss of a daughter. Now that she is found, can I not command myself, and take her to my heart. Let me see her, and then judge of the strength of a Spaniard's mind."

I left the room, and hurried to the apartment where Gracia was waiting. She was expecting me.

"He is ready to receive you," I said, as I took her hand, and looked upon her beautiful face, sorrowful enough to think that I was to surrender so much that was precious to the custody of another.

For a moment she laid her head upon my breast, and I thought I saw tears in her dark eyes. I kissed them off, and, hand in hand, we proceeded to the library, without exchanging a word. A dozen or twenty slaves were gathered in the passage-way, awaiting their master's pleasure, but the instant they saw the lady an expression of delight burst from them.

"The lady Gracia!" they cried, in astonishment; and two or three of the oldest servants, slaves who had been in the family for years, threw themselves upon their knees, and kissed the hem of her dress as she passed along and smiled upon them.

The door of the library opened, and Francisco and the two

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officers made their exit. It was to give the Don a chance to meet his daughter, for the first time, alone. I left her at the door, and it closed behind her. I heard a few hurried exclamations, and then deep sobs, as though an overburdened heart was relieved by tears.

"Come," cried Francisco, taking my arm, "let us retire to a room where we can be together."

No sooner was the wish expressed than the major-domo of the house was at our elbows. He was already prepared to worship the rising sun. The two officers were neglected, where a few moments before their slightest wish was law. The rascals did not look happy as they stood in the corridor, surrounded by slaves, who knew not why the sailors had fallen into disgrace, and cared less; but, with true human instinct, they were ready to neglect and insult those whom but a few moments before they had fawned upon. I felt a little compassion for the fellows, although they did not deserve any. I asked the major-domo if he had received any orders regarding the men.

"Si, senor," he replied. "The Don has given directions that they be kept until further commands. I know not what he intends to do."

"Can't you let them have a room, until your master's orders are known?" I asked.

The negro shook his head, and Francisco drew me away.

The major-domo showed us into a room, where some rare pictures hung against the wall, while the furniture was light, but of that kind which Cubans most delight in, the seats of the chairs and the lounge being of willow, open work, wrought in the most fanciful designs, and the whole looking very cool and comfortable.

"You did splendidly," cried Francisco, throwing himself upon the lounge and lighting a cigar. "You summed up the points in the most skilful manner, and then laid the whole before the old gentleman in such a way, that he could not fail to see how the land lay at once. And what gratified me more than all, you did it in such a gentlemanly style I could see you made a strong impression upon the Don. When I can call you his son-in-law, I shall be as pleased as yourself."

I was too thoughtful to reply. I had seen Gracia's father, and in his eyes I had read pride as strongly implanted as if belonging to the royal house of Spain, and I mentally cursed myself for not

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keeping Gracia on board of the schooner; for, now that I was likely to lose her, I found that my love was ten times stronger than I imagined. While I was thus reflecting and repining, the major-domo opened the door.

"Senor Robert," he said, with a low bow, "the Don wishes to see you, if you are at leisure."

"Strike while the iron is hot," muttered Francisco. "Don't be afraid to push your claims."

I followed the slave to the door of the library. The two officers were no longer standing in the corridor, and no one was to be seen but my escort. The servant threw open the door with a low bow, and I entered. I saw that Don Ingracia was seated by the side of Gracia, holding her hand. His face looked as though he had been shedding tears quite freely, and the brightness of Gracia's eyes was dimmed. I saw one of her looks of love mantle her face as I entered, and that gratified me much.

"My brave young friend," said the Don, rising and taking my hand, "I have much to thank you for, but I do not know how to repay the heavy obligations under which I labor. My dear child, whom I mourned as dead, has told me all and much more than you were willing to add, owing to your modesty; but that is the way with true valor; it always seeks to conceal its merit. How can I thank you?"

"The joy of saving the life of so beautiful a girl is sufficient recompense for me," I replied. "I restored the lady to your arms as soon as I was able, but can't say I regret I was not able to do so before, for the company of your child has done much towards improving my rough men."

"Nay, captain, you must not compliment my child thus, for see how she blushes. But she is grateful to you for the immense service you have rendered, and thanks you with her whole heart."

I stole a look at Gracia to see how that remark might be construed; but she did not return my glance, and I did not dare to mention the subject that was uppermost in my mind. I bowed, and waited for the old gentleman to continue.

"My daughter has told me that any pecuniary offer which I might make you would be rejected immediately. If such is the case, tell me what I can do for you. Whatever you ask I will grant."

"Do you promise me that?" I demanded, eagerly.

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"On the honor of a Castilian, I do," was the response.

I was about to ask for that which was most dear to me, but I stole a glance at Gracia, and saw that she gave me a sign not to do so.

"I shall remind you of your promise some day," I said.

"Do so, and without fear of having your favor refused. Come, be seated, and let me hear from your lips, once more, the dangers my child has escaped."

I took a seat by the side of Gracia, and while the old gentleman's back was turned on us for a moment, seized her hand and pressed it to my lips. She smiled, and her old look of love returned to her face.

"Ah, my dear child," said the Don, taking a seat near us, "you will never realize how deep my grief was at the news of your death. For days I refused to eat, drink, or sleep, and it seemed to me that life was no longer desirable. I used to sit before your portrait and shed bitter tears at my loss; but once, while I was thus engaged, I thought that the saints whispered to me consolation, and bade me hope, for somehow I arose from prayer with a feeling something akin to resignation at my loss. Then came the two rascals whom you have seen, and whose wondrous lies you have heard, strange to say, I did not really believe what they told me. I had a feeling, which I cannot describe, that I should yet hear from my child; and when, senor, you commenced your narrative, I believed that the saints had sent you to me to communicate good tidings."

"I am sure you would have thought he was sent by the saints to protect me, if you could have seen him on board of the schooner," added Gracia. "Surrounded on all sides by vicious people and designing men, yet the senor Robert was enabled to care for me, and save me from insult. I am sure I was very comfortable by his exertions."

Perhaps I felt I did not deserve so much praise; so turned the conversation as soon as possible.

"Have the two officers left the plantation?" I asked of the Don.

"I think they have by this time," was the calm reply. "But if they have not we shall see them before they take their departure."

Just at that moment we heard some shouts out doors, and I

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stepped to the window to see what was the matter. A dozen negroes, evidently field slaves, were standing in a group, their hands filled with oranges and pine-apples. They appeared to be waiting for some one, and were laughing heartily.

Suddenly I heard more shouting, and the two officers of the Virgin ran past, followed by a dozen or twenty field hands, who were throwing oranges at the fugitives, and sometimes heavier articles. In this sport the slaves I had first seen joined, and they seemed to think considerable of the fun; for they threw the oranges with such good will, that every one of them told with crushing effect upon the persons of the fugitives. They were spattered from head to foot with the yellow juice of the fruit, and each hit was the signal for shouts of laughter from the blacks.

"This is the manner in which I thought proper to punish the cowards," said Don Ingracia. "I have directed the slaves to drive them from the plantation, but not offer more serious injury. The rogues enjoy the sport — don't they?"

During the remainder of the first portion of the day I spent at Don Ingracia's country-seat, I strove to obtain a moment's conversation with Gracia alone, but found it impossible. Her father was always with her, as though fearful that if he should leave her for a moment, she would be spirited off, and never return.

It is true I had the pleasure of handing the lady to the dinner table, and of being seated beside her, but the Don was so full of conversation we had to listen to him and return correct answers to his questions; but once, while I was thinking of something else, I astonished the Don by making a random reply, which caused him to look grave, and Gracia signed to me that I must be careful in that respect, for her father liked a good listener.

The dinners which Don Ingracia gave were stupendous affairs, and always lasted one or two hours, before coffee was served. The table was always loaded with choice viands and fruits of all descriptions, from the orange to the choicest of grapes and the sweetest of mangoes.

"Senor," said the Don, at our dinner, after the first course was over, "fill your glass, and let us drink to the health of the queen, whom the saints bless."

A servant promptly filled my glass with nice champagne, which had never paid a dime towards the revenue of the island.

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"My dear child, whom the saints have restored to me," continued the Don, with admirable gravity, "has informed me that I cannot call you a countryman, but you will have just as warm a place in my affections as though you were. I have always respected the Americans for their bravery and enterprise, although between you and me, as friends, I do think that they should retain their fillibusters at home, and not keep our government continually on the alert for them."

"I quite agree with you, senor," I replied, much to the gratification of Gracia, who squeezed my hand beneath the table in token of her approval of my coolness.

"I am glad to hear it, senor," the Don continued; "you will remain with us and become one of my family, I trust, and I shall take pleasure in showing to you that the planters of Cuba know how to enjoy themselves, and know how to reward brave deeds. Your fortune shall be my immediate object, provided you wish to leave the sea."

"That I have already resolved upon," I replied. "But as far as fortune is concerned, I have sufficient of this world's goods to satisfy even my ambition. I am what the world calls rich, so that I am not dependent upon any one, although there is no one whom I would accept a favor from quicker than Don Ingracia."

The Spaniard bowed. He was pleased to think I was richer than he supposed, and I need not inform the public that great men always like a friend better if no favors, in a pecuniary way, are asked for.

"That's the style to put it," muttered Francisco, who was making free with the Don's wine.

"Such being the case," continued the Don, "you can have no hesitancy in accepting my offer, and consider my house as your own during your stay in Cuba. I have been very lonely the past three months, but now I shall try and be more sociable. We will have a few parties to welcome the return of my daughter, and I need not tell you that your presence here will gratify my friends as well as myself. I need not speak for my daughter, for she will add her persuasion to mine."

I bowed, and Gracia looked gratified.

"Are you happy now?" she whispered.

"Not so happy as when we were on board of the Coquette," I replied.

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"Have patience," she responded. "You must win my father's love as you have won mine."

"Since we have disposed of that business," said the Don, who had forgotten all about his previous toast, "let us fill clean glasses, and drink to the health and happiness of the queen."

We drank the toast with all due solemnity; Francisco, with a demonstration that sounded like a cheer, at which the Don did not object, for he was loyal to his sovereign, and thought Spain the greatest nation upon the earth.

"Yes, I shall send invitations to my friends to meet at the house day after to-morrow," the Don continued. "By that time my child will have recovered from her fatigue, and will be ready to welcome them. Senor Francisco, if your employers can spare you from Havana for a period, I shall be happy to see you. And now, senors, let us drink the health of the captain general, and then we will look over the plantation, if you have no objections."

We drank the health of the gentleman alluded to, and arose from the table. I offered my arm to Gracia, and although the Don kept close to our heels, as though to hear every word we exchanged, yet I managed to speak to her.

"When shall I see you for a few minutes alone?" I asked.

"This evening," she replied.

"Where?"

"Why, where do you suppose?"

"I have not the slightest idea," I answered.

"Then you are uncommonly stupid. Your sitting-room adjoins mine, and my father's apartment is in front of the house. Need I say more."

"How shall I thank you?" I asked.

"By treating my father as though you desired to secure his love and respect. This you will have to do before he will consent to our union."

"I promise with all my heart," I answered; and leaving her at the door of the drawing-room, bowed and repaired to my chamber to dress for my horseback ride.

Luckily I had brought a large valise with me, filled with linen and change of outside clothing, and I don't care to confess that all was of the first quality, and made to fit me by an American tailor; for, let me inform you, gentle reader, that the majority

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of Spanish tailors are botchers, and have no more idea of "fits" than a wild African, who never saw a pair of pants.

While selecting my riding suit, I came across my revolver. I do not know what prompted me, but examined the weapon and found it was carefully loaded, and laid it upon the table to carry with me. Upon going down stairs I saw three saddle horses at the front door, and the Don and Francisco awaiting me. Gracia was also standing on the piazza to see us start.

"Be careful, Robert," Gracia whispered. "You must not make a failure before my father and the servants."

"Neither shall I;" and as I spoke they led up a high-spirited black horse which I was to ride.

I saw that the stirrups were of the right length, and that the animal had a good curb-bit in his mouth, by means of which I could cut his tongue off with but a slight pressure upon the bridle. The horse seemed full of fire, and I liked him all the better for it.

One of the servants buckled a pair of spurs upon my heels, and I was ready to "witch the world with noble horsemanship." All watched my movements with considerable curiosity, for Spaniards will not admit that Americans know how to ride, and it must be confessed that after seeing them pick up silver dollars from the ground while their horses were at full speed, I was inclined to believe them.

I laid my hand upon the pommel, gathered the reins up, and then, while they thought I was meditating on the matter, sprang into the saddle without touching a stirrup. The horse gave a sudden bound and danced for a moment, but I soon had him in hand, and was too firmly seated to be dismounted by any common shock.

We turned our horses' heads, and rode along the carriage-way until we gained the road. I looked back and saw Gracia was watching us; and as she was hid from sight threw me a kiss, but her father did not see the action.

"I shall first take you to the sugar fields," said the owner of the plantation, "and let you see how the cane is cultivated. The negroes are probably at work there hoeing, and you can notice if they seem contented with their lot."

While he was speaking we reached a path leading to a vast field which contained as much as a thousand acres, and was filled with a crop of cane that looked uncommonly flourishing.

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By the sudden turn of a road we came upon some six hundred negroes, who were stripped to their waists, and hoeing with implements of the rudest kind, and not working as though their hearts were fixed upon completing the job; yet every one of the slaves was looking contented, and many of them were singing, while others joined in a chorus.

Upon horseback, armed with a whip and a brace of pistols, was the overseer of this division of slaves. He was a swarthy-looking fellow, with wicked black eyes, and did not look to me as though he would stand long debating the merits and demerits of a negro. He saluted the Don by touching his hat, and looking inquiringly at Francisco and myself.

"How does the cane look, Irenta?" asked the Don.

"Never better, senor. We shall make five hundred more boxes this year than we did last, unless the rain fail us."

"The saints be praised for that," was the pious ejaculation of the Don. "Next year we can plant more cane, for I have two hundred and fifty more slaves on their way to the plantation for you to break in."

"I can do it, senor," was the answer; and the overseer cracked his long whip as though he rather liked the thought of what was before him.

"As soon as they have gained strength, set them at work," the master said; and the overseer bowed in token of obedience.

I sat on horseback and smoked a cigar, and watched the slaves as they stirred up the land and eradicated the weeds, which were growing between the rows of cane. I did not see that the negroes were overworked, and I have seen in the Northern States boys driven twice as hard as they were. Some of them would lean upon their hoes, and gaze at us with expressions of wonder upon their faces, and after a long stare would resume labor, satisfied with their observation, while others would make some humorous observation which would set the blacks roaring, to be quickly silenced by the loud snap of the overseer's whip; and when it did snap, the slaves went to work with energy, as though to make amends for their idleness. From this I was convinced that the dark Irenta did not scruple to flog if occasion required.

"They are a happy-looking set of negroes — are they not?" asked Don Ingracia.

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I replied that they looked far from miserable, and hoped the blacks were as well treated on other plantations.

As we turned our horses' heads to ride to the next field, the overseer spoke to us.

"If you are going to the cattle-field, senor, you must give that English bull a wide berth, for he has grown ugly within a few days. Last night he gave chase to two of the field hands, and they only saved themselves by reaching a tree."

Don Ingracia laughed and said, —

"If I had a *riatta* I would attack the brute, and let my friends see that I have not lost the skill which I once possessed. I think that with a good rope on his hind leg I could soon take the fight out of him."

The Don, like many other gentlemen of Cuba, was a cattle fancier, and had been at some expense in importing the best kind from England and the United States. He had a pasture containing nearly a thousand acres; all excellent land, and suitable for the growth of coffee and sugar, whenever the owner was disposed to break it up for that purpose.

We rode for some distance without seeing the herd; they were in a valley where a small stream of water was running through a strip of most luxuriant vegetation, and were reclining under shade trees, chewing their cuds, but not with sweet contentment, for the mosquitos were quite thick, and were annoying the animals by their sharp attacks.

Perhaps it was on this account the bulls were unusually savage; for no sooner did we heave in sight than an old Spanish bull, a monster of ugliness, commenced roaring and throwing the earth into the air as he pawed it with his hoofs. This viciousness was soon communicated to an English bull, which came running from the other side of a small hill; and the brutes, instead of fighting each other, seemed disposed to make common cause and fight us.

I must confess that our position was not a pleasant one, and I suggested as much to the Don; but that gentleman was disposed to laugh.

"Be not alarmed, senor," he said, "for I know the habits of these animals, and think they are peaceable. Look at that Devon cow. Did you ever see anything equal her?"

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"I see her," I replied, "but I can't help seeing those bulls at the same time. If ever two animals meant mischief, they do, and I think we had better beat a retreat while there is time."

"And I second that motion with all my heart," cried Francisco. "If ever an animal had a spite against me, that big bull has, and just because I have winked at him two or three times. Let us leave the brutes to their cuds and mosquitos."

The Don smiled and moved his horse nearer to the bulls, as though to show how much they were maligned, and as he did so, he turned to point out a favorite heifer among the herd. The bulls seemed to consider this as an offer of combat, and were not slow to accept the challenge. I saw them lower their heads, and rush towards the Don, while I forgot my own safety in thinking of that of Gracia's father. I spurred my horse towards him, and shouted to him to be on his guard; but the old gentleman was thinking of his favorite, and did not notice me, and the next instant horse and rider were rolling over and over on the grass, the horse with two terrible wounds in its side, through which the entrails protruded.

I found that the animal I rode was frightened, and that it was impossible to spur him towards the scene; but if the life of the old gentleman was to be saved, it was necessary I should exert myself. I did not think that if he was out of the way it would be easy for me to enjoy his wealth by marrying his daughter without the slightest opposition. No; my only thought was to save him, even at the risk of my own life.

As soon as the horse and rider had fallen, the two bulls stopped for a moment to survey the damage which they had occasioned. The pause enabled me to recollect I had a loaded revolver in my pocket, and that I could use it to great advantage in protecting myself and the Don. As for Francisco, he had galloped towards a gate as fast as his horse could carry him; and, to tell the truth, I did not much blame him, for why should he endanger his life to save that of a man who he knew cared nothing for him, owing to their different positions in society?

Finding that my horse had never been trained to encounter cattle, and would not approach the bulls, I dismounted, and throwing the bridle over my left arm, advanced upon the animals. At that time Don Ingracia was struggling to get upon his knees, having extricated himself from beneath the wounded horse. The

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old gentleman, I noticed, was a little wild, and seemed like one who had lost his self-possession.

As I advanced, the bulls were about to charge for a second time upon the Don, and I knew that if they did, they would soon stamp out all evidence of vitality which he contained. I therefore created a diversion in his favor by shouting, and thus attracted the animals' attention; and as soon as they saw me, they seemed to comprehend that I was the real enemy whom they had got to encounter, and that they would battle with me without fear or favor. I saw them measure the distance which separated us, and I noted their eyes flash fire as they pawed the earth and bellowed forth a defiance. My horse trembled violently, and showed no inclination to advance farther; yet I continued to move on in the direction of the animals until I was within two rods of them, when I stopped and awaited the onset, and to do that successfully drew my revolver and cocked it.

I was not suffered to remain long in suspense. The bulls grew more in earnest every moment. They threw clods of earth into the air, and the foam issued from their nostrils in flakes. I stood before them calmly awaiting their charge, and with my plans already developed. I cast one quick glance at Don Ingracia, to see if he was safe, and found that he was seated on the grass looking at the animals and myself with considerable wonder. I feared that if my antagonists defeated me, they would turn their attention to the Don, and defeat him also; so I gave him a word of advice.

"Don Ingracia," I said, "come this way, and mount my horse, and make your escape. There is time enough to do so."

"And what will you do?" asked the old gentleman, quite composedly.

"O, I will take care of myself," I said.

"And I'll stay and help you," was the answer.

"Are you injured?" I asked.

"My leg is stiff where the horse rolled on it, but otherwise I am well."

I had no time to say more. With a mighty bellow the two bulls came towards me, and the rascals seemed to have agreed to a division of their work, for the Spanish bull aimed at me, and the English bull steered for the horse.

I found I could not be certain of my aim if I held on to the

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horse, for he was plunging violently to free himself, so I slipped the bridle from my arm and let him run; and he did run, with the English bull close to his heels, a pair of horns making unpleasant gyrations towards his haunches. But I had no time to note more, for I had to attend to my own safety. The Spanish bull meant mischief, and evidently counted on tossing me on his horns without the slightest resistance; but he was slightly disappointed, for when he was within six feet of me, I aimed my revolver fair at his head, fired, and then jumped aside.

The ball struck fair, for I heard it; but the bull's head had waged too many combats to be easily affected; therefore the bullet flattened and rolled off as though it had struck against a wall of steel. On went the animal, while the only notice he took of my presence was to shake his head more fiercely, and to bellow louder.

The animal ran about a rod beyond me, stopped suddenly, and wheeled about to see what had become of me. He appeared slightly astonished, for according to his calculation I should have been some twenty feet in the air, and revolving on my own axis towards the earth, like one of the planets. He evidently did not know what to make of it, but his pluck was equal to his bulk, and he determined to try again.

"My friend," cried the Don, who was still seated, too much excited to make his escape, "I'm fearful that bull will gore you to death."

The Don was quite gentlemanly, and would have helped me if he could. As it was, he could not help himself, and therefore was to be excused.

"I shall try to prevent him," I answered; and I would have said more, but the bull demanded all my attention just at that moment; for he made a second plunge at me, with his head close to the ground, and his horns moving as though a nest of hornets was flying around him. He steered directly for me, his tail standing out as straight as a studding-sail boom, and the hair on his neck curling into hard knots from the effects of his rage. I thought, as I awaited the onset, I would try him on another tack, for I didn't intend to waste any more powder and ball. When he was within six feet of me, I stepped one side, and he plunged along; but as he did so, I put the muzzle of my revolver close to his fore-shoulder, and fired.

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The huge brute ran on for a few feet, then faltered and fell upon his knees. The blood gushed out of his wound in torrents, and after several attempts to rise, the animal rolled over on his side, and bellowed a death-song to his indifferent harem, most of whom were feeding quite composedly upon the hillside.

Then Don Ingracia saw fit to rise and come towards me.

"I suppose there is no danger of him now," he said.

"I think not," I answered.

The Don began to praise my conduct, which I knew meant that I should retaliate and praise him at some future day. The task was not an agreeable one, but what was I to do? I loved his daughter, and loved her more and more as I saw that there was a prospect of losing her. I was determined to secure the old man's respect if possible, and then ask him for the lady's hand. If he did not consent, there were other ways of proceeding, and no flattery would be used.

Before we reached the gate, Francisco, accompanied by the overseer, Irenta, and a dozen of the field hands, were seen rushing towards us, and they expressed some surprise when they saw we were safe.

"Safe!" cried the Don; "yes, the saints be praised, we are safe; but, Senor Francisco, it is not by your valor, for you deserted us at the first charge."

"And why did I do so?" asked my friend, without the slightest confusion. "Was I not attacked by a bull as well as you, and did I not lead him away to a distant part of the field, so that you could have a fair fight? Didn't I also go for help? and lo! the help is here;" and Francisco pointed to the grinning negroes who were grouped around us.

As his story was strictly true, the Don had nothing more to say; but I could see by his face that he didn't believe what had been uttered, and probably thought that Francisco should have perilled his life, and considered himself amply repaid with a word for so doing.

"As I see you are a little stiff, perhaps you will honor me by taking my horse. I assure you I can walk;" and Francisco dismounted.

The Don didn't like the idea of walking to his house with a lame leg, and he didn't wish to confess he was injured in the least. But the lame limb carried the day, and by the aid of the

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slaves the old gentleman was hoisted upon the back of the horse, and started for home, while Francisco and myself followed slowly after; the overseer and the slaves proceeded to the spot where the dead bull lay, for the purpose of serving it out to the workmen as food for the next day.

"Did you hear the old fool?" asked Francisco, as we walked along.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Why, his sneering at me because I put spurs to my horse when a bull was close upon me, and would have thought no more of tossing me than a nigger baby. I'm not such a fool as to sacrifice myself on his account, although I can't say how I should feel if I was in love with his daughter."

"Perhaps you would have acted as I have done," I replied.

"Perhaps I should," responded Francisco, doubtingly; "but I have my suspicions that I should not."

We reached the house, and found it in an uproar. Servants were hurrying to and fro; one was on horseback just starting for a doctor. Every one was concerned and excited because the great man of the mansion had met with an accident, and injured one of his legs. Gracia was with her father, — so one of the servants told me, — and I judged that the old gentleman was something of a Tartar when confined to his room.

At length I sent word to her, and she promised to join me in the sitting-room in a few minutes; and to that apartment I repaired, eager for an interview, for it seemed an age since I had spoken to her privately.

It was just dark when I went to the room and impatiently awaited the appearance of Gracia. The custom of the country is to sit in the dark as long as possible, because a light attracts so many winged insects, and compels the closing of the windows, excluding that air which is so delicious after the sun has set, ladened as it is with so many delightful perfumes. So absorbed was I in contemplating and listening to matters out of doors, that I did not hear Gracia when she entered the apartment, and she laid her small hand upon my shoulder before I was aware of her presence.

"What a gallant knight," she said, "to send for a lady, and fall asleep while waiting for her!"

I caught her in my arms, and pressed her most fervently to my

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heart, and, to tell the truth, she made not the slightest objections.

"Can you remain long?" I asked.

"Not more than half an hour," she replied, "and then I shall have to return to my father, who is fretting because one of his slaves has run away this evening, and gone to the mountains. In spite of the condition of his leg, he is determined to go in pursuit in the morning, for he fears that if one slave is suffered to escape, it will encourage others to make the attempt."

"How is your father's injury?"

"It is not near as bad he expected, and the physician says he can mount his horse to-morrow, if he desires. He speaks in glowing terms of you, and says that you saved his life. There is one thing I wish you would promise me," she whispered.

"I will promise anything you please," I answered.

"If my father concludes to search for the slave to-morrow, I want you to accompany him."

"I could enjoy myself much better at home with you," I answered.

"I grant it," was the reply, "but it is on your account I ask this favor. My father intimated to me he should like your company, but felt some delicacy in inviting you. If we are separated for a few hours, consider how delightful it will seem to look forward to our meeting again."

"I don't like the business of hunting a slave who has made a bold strike for his liberty; yet to oblige you and win you, I would do most anything. There will be some excitement in the chase, and perhaps I can benefit the poor fellow we ride after. Yes, I will go, but I must have a kiss to pay for my consent."

Soon afterwards I strolled out upon the piazza, where the major-domo found me, and stated that the Don desired my presence in his private apartment.

"Ah, my friend," he said, as I entered the room, "I am glad to see you. You saved my life to-day, and now I'm under double obligations to you. Here's Gracia, however, who does not seem to be so glad to see you as I could wish. Come, girl, smile upon the gentleman who saved your life and mine."

"Indeed, father, I'm so much concerned regarding your health, that it's doubtful if I can call up a smile for any one. But in my heart I'm deeply sensible of the obligations under which we labor."

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"That's well said, and I'll consent that your smile shall remain hidden for a few days. Come, young gentleman, be seated, and talk with me of America, or I'll talk with you of Spain, and tell you what a grand nation it is. To-morrow it is probable I shall not see you all day, for one of my best slaves has run off, and I'll hunt for a week but I'll find him. The ungrateful hound — I've treated him like a child for years, and may the saints curse him for doing as he has done. If I find him, I'll cut his black hide until it assumes another color. If I could induce you to join me to-morrow, I think I could show you a feature of our country a stranger rarely sees," the Don said, turning to me, and speaking as though he rather thought I would decline.

"I accept the invitation," I said, "not for the purpose of slave-hunting, — for I rather like the pluck of the fellow who has run away, — but for the purpose of being near you, and aiding you if in danger."

"You give me joy to think I'm to have the presence of so rational a man. I usually leave these things to my overseer; but the slave who has left me is of some importance, and I desire his capture above all things. We shall start soon after daylight."

I bowed and took my leave, but it was a late hour before I slept, for Gracia and I had much to talk of before we retired.

"We shall have fine weather for the hunt," the Spaniard said, as he sipped his coffee the next morning. "Irenta tells me that the dogs are eager and in good spirits, and will take the scent readily."

"What dogs?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Why, the Cuban bloodhounds, to be sure. How did you suppose we could find the slave without their assistance?"

I began to feel sorry that I had embarked in such an enterprise, but I saw no way to recede.

"I have two of the best dogs in the country," the Don continued. "They are fed and attended by white men alone, and are taught to always manifest signs of hostility to negroes. They can take a trail and keep it for forty-eight hours without sleep or rest, and within thirty-six hours of an escape. By bloodhounds we are enabled to keep our slaves in subjection, and prevent them from taking to the woods; for the blacks fear the dogs, and well they may. The animals are not scrupulous when once they have come up with a runaway."

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"But have you thought of the barbarity of such a method?" I asked, without stopping to think of the importance of the question.

"To be sure I have. It is cruel to hunt slaves with dogs, but it is much more cruel to lose your property. All planters with large gangs of slaves keep dogs, and very useful they are."

I shook my head, but the Don only smiled.

"Why, the people of the United States have hunted Indians with dogs, and even your government has purchased them for a similar purpose."

I told him I thought not.

"Then I will convince you that such is the case. My neighbor, Don Enrique, has been engaged in breeding bloodhounds for sale for many years. A few months since he sold the American consul at Havana thirty of the animals, at an enormous price. The dogs went to Florida to hunt the Indians. They were bought for that purpose, and used for that purpose, and I think the State Department will indorse my statement."

Of course I had no more to say on that point, and by the time we had finished our coffee and chickens, we were ready for a start. The evil-looking Irenta, overseer, entered the room, and announced that the horses and dogs were ready.

"The dogs are lively," he said, with a wicked smile, "and would think nothing of eating a negro for breakfast. For fear of accidents I have put muzzles on them, for I know you esteem the black rascal who has left you."

The Don made a faint show of seeming glad, but I thought he would have had but little objection to so exciting a spectacle; for Spaniards love cock fights, bull baits, tiger fights, and battles of every kind excepting those decided by a charge of bayonets and cavalry. Those they don't like, and I don't know that I blame them much.

We lighted cigars, filled our cases with the same, and then found our horses at the front door. Two overseers, besides the Don and myself, were of the party, and we were considered sufficient to cope with the slave by the aid of two dogs and our knives and pistols.

I must confess I entertained a pretty good opinion of the smartness of the runaway, when I saw such formidable preparations to capture him; but we sprang into our saddles, — the Don with a few groans as he thought of his bruises, — and then rode

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to the dog-kennel, which was near the stable, and so situated that only the overseers could have access to it through the house which they inhabited with their families. This arrangement prevented the negroes from becoming familiar with the dogs, and thereby refusing to trail them in case they escaped, as such things had occurred on plantations where discipline was light.

Irenta went into one of the houses, and returned with two bloodhounds of enormous size. They were of a deep bay color, with huge jaws and powerful haunches, but did not seem any too good-natured even towards their masters, for I really thought the brutes would have taken mouthfuls from the overseer's body by way of a lunch, if they had not been muzzled. Possibly they more than half suspected Irenta was a negro, and he was black enough for one, there is no doubt.

The hounds were kept in control by means of a leash; otherwise they would have started off upon the first negro's track they came across, and would have followed the poor black, and torn him down, even if he had been seated in the midst of his family. They uttered two or three impatient bays when they found that they could not start off at pleasure, and then, with sulky airs, lay down to rest and await our pleasure.

"They are in good condition this morning," Irenta said, with a cold-blooded smile, "and can follow a negro for hours over hills and through woods. They are game animals, and worthy of even the captain general."

"Ah, that they are," the Don said. "I don't believe his excellency ever saw a pair which could take a slave as neat. They do honor to their training."

The overseer touched his hat at the compliment, and patted the dogs; but they did not seem to appreciate the flattery, and looked more evil disposed than ever.

"How," I asked, "are the dogs to know the direction the slave has taken?"

"We will soon show the senor that the dogs are trained in the most approved manner;" and as Irenta spoke, he entered his house, and returned with a pair of old pants which had belonged to the negro who had escaped.

The pants were laid before the dogs, but they refused to take the least notice of them, and cast their bright eyes upon objects afar off, as though they longed to be at work.

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"It's no use, senor," Irenta said, looking at the Don; "the dogs will not take the scent with the muzzles on."

"Then off with them, in the name of the saints," cried the Don. "It is better to tear the slave limb from limb than let him escape without some punishment."

This was an order which the overseers relished. I could tell that by the grim smile which stole over their swarthy features, and by the glitter of their black eyes. What cared they, in the excitement of the hunt, how much the runaway suffered? The muzzles were taken off, and the huge and sinewy brutes uttered a bay of joy as they licked their chops, and snuffed the morning air.

"They have not been fed for twenty-four hours, senor," said Irenta, with a glance of admiration at the dogs; "and if they should meet the black rascal, his life would not be worth a real."

"So much the better," replied the Don. "The slave had no gratitude, or he would never have left so kind a master as I have been to him."

I thought his overseers could have told a different story had they been so disposed, and I wondered what they had done to the black to drive him away from his home; and while I was wondering and speculating, Irenta spread the ragged pants before the dogs, and they commenced sniffing at them eagerly, and then with noses close to the ground they circled round and round, increasing the circumference of the circles each minute, until just as they reached the orchard, beneath an orange tree, the hounds uttered fierce bays, and started off towards a high hill which skirted the extensive plantation of Don Ingracia, and which was covered with trees and underbrush.

"Now, then, Senor Capitan, we must follow," cried Don Ingracia, striking his spurs into his horse's sides, and causing him to clear a fence with a bound. I followed and kept close to the Don, while the two overseers remained near the dogs, which ran with noses to the ground, not faster than eight miles an hour.

"The scent is feeble," said the Don, "but I will wager an ounce that it will lead us to the Devil's Glen in less than three hours."

I then learned that the glen was a place inaccessible to horses, and noted as the resort of all the runaway slaves in the neighborhood.

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CHAPTER XV.

IN PURSUIT OF A RUNAWAY SLAVE.—WHAT HAPPENED TO US AND HOW WE MET WITH SEVERAL ADVENTURES ON THE WAY.

We passed over an uncultivated country, our course sometimes leading us among bushes so thick that it was extremely difficult to urge our animals through them. At other times we crossed small streams and bogs, where our horses floundered until they were nearly up to their saddle girths in mud and water; but still the bloodhounds kept the scent, and if puzzled it was only for a moment. They tracked the slave as truly as though he had been but a few rods in advance of them, and in sight all of the time.

The mountain, towards which we were directing our course, looked barren and rugged, and its base did not seem more than five miles from the plantation when we started; but I found that appearances were deceitful, and at nine o'clock we were still toiling on under a sun which seemed to blister the skin upon our hands and faces, although both were protected by hats and gloves. Our horses, too, suffered intensely, bitten as they were by swamp flies and mosquitos of mammoth size and unparalleled ferocity. But still we pressed on, ascending a rising grade, leaving the trees and bushes behind us.

"The saints be praised," muttered the Don, "we are almost at the place where we can dismount from these beasts and stretch our limbs. Had I known the sun was so hot, I should have remained at home."

I wished he had known it, for I thought how much more pleasant my time would have passed had Gracia been by my side. Sleeping or waking, she was ever in my thoughts, and I had reason to believe I was the only object she cared for, with the exception of her father.

We struggled up a steep hill so slippery that even the horses could hardly maintain their footing, and pressed close upon the dogs until we reached the summit; and then a halt was called, and a welcome one it was to us all.

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"Here," said Irenta, "we leave the horses, for it is impossible for them to go farther. We have to descend the hill, and then we shall know whether the slave has escaped to the glen."

We dismounted and tied our animals to some shrubs which grew upon the hill, and which formed an excellent shade for the brutes from the hot sun; but before we started on foot, the second overseer, Pedro, took from a knapsack flasks of claret and a glass. The sight of the wine was far from being unwelcome, for our throats were parched by our long ride. We drank a tumbler full of the claret, each of us, and then turning, followed the dogs down the hill, and floundered on amid wrecked trees which had been uprooted by hurricanes, and from the trunks of which new shoots were lifting their heads only to be served in the some manner by the next fierce shock that swept through the valley, leaving ruin and destruction behind. All was quiet and silent as death. Even the hounds uttered no bays, as though they knew that the end of our mission was near; but they followed the scent with noses close to the ground, and with their blood-red tongues hanging from their mouths, from which dripped drops of foam.

We were near a decayed tree, which had yielded years before to the wind, and I was about to spring over it, when I was checked by a sudden hiss which sounded so ominous it was not necessary to tell me that danger was before us. The dogs were on the tree, and about to spring to the ground; but at the sound of the hiss, they drew back, and manifested some signs of terror. I did not move, for my experience in Africa had taught me that near at hand was a serpent, and one of the venomous kind. I feared to stir, for I did not know but I might step on the slimy monster; and while I was looking among the underbrush and decayed limbs, the devil prompted Irenta to come up and push the hounds off the trunk of the tree, but before I had time to warn him that danger was before us.

"There is a snake near at hand," I said. "Tread carefully or you may step on him."

"A snake!" cried all three Spaniards in a breath. "The Virgin protect us;" and every man of them crossed himself as though already bitten.

"Where is he?" cried the Don, glancing around with nervous haste, and retreating backwards with trembling steps.

I had no occasion to answer the question. On the other side

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of the fallen tree there was a sudden yelp, and I saw one of the hounds in the embrace of a snake, which was not larger in circumference than a silver dollar, and not more than five feet long, as near as I could judge. From the hood upon the snake's neck, I thought it was a cobra, one of the most venomous reptiles in Cuba. Its bite is death, and animals of all kind shun it with an instinctive dread of its power, with the single exception of the hog, which boldly offers combat, and always triumphs by eating its adversary, and appears but little affected by the bites which it receives during the fight. This is probably owing to the fat upon the body of the porcine, poison not being able to penetrate to its vital parts. The slaves tell of many desperate combats between the cobra and hog, but they always acknowledge that the latter conquers, and conclude by eating the body of the slain with ferocious satisfaction and keen relish.

As I said before, the hound uttered a yelp of terror upon being attacked, and strove with its ponderous jaws to bite the cobra; but the snake was too quick in its motions, and I could see, while standing near, regarding the fight, that the reptile's fangs were repeatedly struck at the hound's neck, and each bite was succeeded by a wail of terror on the part of the dog, while the animal that was uninjured suddenly turned, and with its tail between its legs struck a straight line for home, too much frightened at the position of its companion to think of rendering assistance, or to care about the trail which it had followed so faithfully during the forenoon.

The fight between the snake and the dog was soon terminated. The poison which the former had communicated to the latter began to work, and in five minutes the hound was hardly able to stand, and seemed quite bewildered, while the cobra quietly commenced preparations for leaving the body of its victim.

During all this time our party was too much astonished to offer the hound the least assistance. The Spaniards were as fearful of the deadly enemy as myself, and perhaps more; and while the fight was going on, they stood crossing themselves, and calling upon the saints to look down and protect them.

"*Diablo!*" cried the Don; "the viper will kill my dog. Irenta, save him from such a fate."

"Ah, senor, but the cursed beast will bite me, whom the saints protect from such a death. May the devil confound him, and burn him for this."

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"But my dog," muttered the Don, who took excellent care to keep at a distance.

Irenta shrugged his shoulders, and showed no inclination of saving the animal, even if such a thing were possible. The Don grew indignant.

"Irenta," he said, "will you kill the snake, whom the devil take, or must I lose the dog?"

"The dog is already lost," I said, coming to the relief of the overseer, much to his gratification. "All the surgeons in Cuba could not save him, and it is useless for a brave man to endanger his life by thinking of such a thing."

The Don was under too many obligations to me to get enraged, and therefore kept at a safe distance, and asked, —

"Can't we kill the devil, and thus revenge the dog? He is a noble animal, and cost me two ounces when a pup."

The cobra was satisfied with what it had done, for it began to crawl away from the dog, but hissed as though it hated us more than the hound. Once the reptile stopped and raised its hooded head, and its sharp eyes gleamed at us as though uncertain whether we should be spared. I thought it a shame to let the snake escape, but did not care to attack it with a stick, so tried the effect of powder and ball, and the next instant the cobra was making the dust fly as it tied itself up in knots, and even bit its own body in agony.

My shot had taken effect in the head of the snake, and its power to injure was gone. Even the hound rejoiced at the revenge, for the dying brute raised itself upon its fore legs and uttered one deep bay, and then tumbled over dead, and the cobra was not long in following his example. It straightened its body out, uttered one hiss, and gave up the ghost.

"A cussed viper!" muttered the Don, seizing a stick and pounding the body. "It killed one of my best dogs, and what am I to do now, I should like to know?"

I told them, as we were in the immediate vicinity of the glen, that we had better continue our explorations, with a careful eye for cobras — a remark that made all three of the Spaniards glance around among the brush most nervously.

My advice carried the day. We resolved to push on; and on we went, startled at every rustle of the leaves, and expecting to see a snake at every step. At length we reached the passage

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that was to lead us to the glen. It was not twenty feet wide, and had been formed at some early period by the rains, which had washed down the mountains and gullied out the space. It was rough and wild, and contained dead trees, swept from the sides of the mountains, and huge rocks which could have crushed an army, if one had entered the gorge on hostile intents.

Over such debris we passed along slowly, leaping from trees to stones and stones to trees, and all the time the sun was pouring down upon us as though it would boil our brains and roast our bodies. The Don suffered more than the rest of us, and it was my privilege to assist and encourage him when he most needed help.

After half an hour's hard work we at length got through the gorge, and then were amply repaid for our trouble, for a scene of wildness greeted us. In the centre of the glen was a lake of clear water, containing some thirty acres, and fed from the mountains. Fish must have abounded there, for I saw numbers of them jump from the water as though longing to be caught. Around the lake were numerous groves of trees, while the mountainous sides were almost perpendicular, and studded with huge boulders, which looked as though they needed but a touch to send them crushing to the valley. It was one of the most solitary looking spots I had ever seen. Nothing was in sight but a huge vulture, which was hovering over the water.

I looked towards the Don to see what he counselled next, but that gentleman had nothing to say. He was willing to turn back, or lie down and rest, neither of which I was anxious to do, for I had some strong reason for letting the Spaniards see that the only American of the party could stand fatigue with the best of them. Irenta's heart I had won by killing the snake, and standing between him and the Don. The second overseer looked to Irenta for advice, and believed as he believed.

"We will leave the Don to guard the outlet to the glen," I said, "while we separate and search for the slave. It will save time, and enable us to return to the plantation before dark."

The Don didn't like the arrangement, but he finally consented, and while the two overseers walked off in one direction around the lake, I walked off in another, with no fears and no hopes of meeting the one I was in search of; and, to tell the truth, I did not have any great wish to, for I thought that a single-handed fight with a desperate slave was not wanting to complete my reputation at San Philipe.

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I had walked, I think, about half a mile from the place where we entered, and was getting most heartily tired of the fun, when I thought I would visit a clump of trees, and rest myself in the shade. I approached the spot softly, for I had come upon it abruptly by turning a point that reached nearly to the edge of the lake; but before I had taken many steps I stopped suddenly, for before me stood a huge negro, naked from his waist upwards.

I think if I had been in Africa, and had, while walking about the outskirts of one of the towns, stumbled on a sleeping lion, I could not have been more surprised than I was to see that stalwart negro standing before me, for I had not expected to meet with any one in my walk, or perhaps I should have chosen company.

Perhaps it was lucky for him and for myself that the negro did not see me, for he was standing with his back towards me, and intent upon something in the water; and after a few seconds I had no difficulty in making out that the slave was fishing, and no doubt depended in a measure upon his success for a supper.

I placed my pistol where I could find it in a hurry, and then walked quietly up to the black; but I made so little noise he did not hear me. At length I spoke, but as calm and cool as if we had been on the plantation, and surrounded by half a dozen overseers.

"Do you have good luck fishing?" I said.

The slave started, dropped his fish-pole into the water, and then jumped more than ten feet in a direct line before he turned to face me. His eyes displayed the terror which filled his heart, and his skin was one shade whiter than usual. He glared at me for a moment, but I pretended not to notice his fear, although I must confess that I kept one eye on his movements thinking he would draw his knife and make a rush at me.

"The fish don't bite very briskly," I said, stooping down and taking up his fish-pole.

The slave was astonished, and could hardly find words to answer. If I had spoken to him crossly, and had manifested hostile intentions, he would have known how to act, and would have defended himself by fighting every odds.

"Let me see if I can't have better luck fishing than you," I said, tearing a rag from the hook, and finding that it was really a good

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one. "Come, catch me that worm you see crawling upon the tree. The one with the green belly and red sides. That is the one. Now bring it here."

The ascendency of a white man still held good over him, for he made haste to obey, as though desirous of pleasing, and was still on a plantation. His face, to be sure, wore many expressions of surprise, but his reason had not recovered its sway since my abrupt appearance.

"Now we shall see if I can be more fortunate than you," I said, as I adjusted the bright-colored worm to the hook in a very scientific manner, and gave it a cast upon the lake.

The slave actually smiled, and looked exceedingly pleased and interested; but for all that I did not for a moment turn my back upon him, for fear that something might happen, and that something, I supposed, would be a sharp knife entering my back, near a shoulder-blade.

"Sit down," I said, "and you shall see me catch you a fish for supper."

I pointed to a stone about two fathoms from me, and the slave obeyed, and watched my line with great interest.

I drew my line in, and gave it a second cast, and it had no sooner struck the water than a fish jumped for the hook and swallowed it with ardent relish. He was a big one, and I commenced playing him, for he showed the most determined fight. I gave him nearly all the line I had, before he stopped or manifested any signs of rising. Then I drew him in slowly, and the slave followed my movements with the utmost concern.

"O, master," he said, in Spanish, "I fear you will lose the fish unless you haul quickly."

"By that means I should certainly lose him," I answered; but the slave did not understand the science of fishing, and was inclined to doubt.

By this time my prize was pretty nearly tired out; so I gently drew him towards the shore, and then, with a sudden swing, landed a three-pound trout-looking fish at the feet of the slave, who seized upon it with many expressions of delight.

"Now find me another worm," I said, still keeping calm, and maintaining an air of superiority which I knew the slave had been accustomed to.

He hurried from tree to tree until he had found the kind of

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insect which I desired, and brought it to me with many expressions of joy.

"Now we shall have another," he said.

"Do you feel hungry?" I asked.

"Ah, senor, I have eaten nothing but fruit for thirty-six hours."

"And you would like a piece of broiled fish?" I asked.

"Yes, senor, very much."

I tossed him half a dozen matches, which I had in my pocket.

"Make a fire and you shall cook the fish, and I will help you eat it."

Just at that moment I had a fresh bite, and succeeded in landing a fish that resembled a perch, and which weighed about a pound. I began to like the fun, and the negro seemed as pleased as myself. He took the hook from the fish's mouth, and found me half a dozen worms without delay.

"Why did you leave Don Ingracia?" I said, while the negro was collecting some dry wood to start a fire.

The slave started, and left his work. I had touched upon a subject that interested him more than fishing. He advanced towards me, but while I kept an eye upon his movements, I did not relinquish the fish-pole. I did not fear him much, for I saw he had not drawn his knife.

"Senor," he asked, folding his arms across his broad chest, "how do you know that I am Don Ingracia's slave?"

"O, by your appearance. The Don described you, even to your eyebrows."

"And you have come in pursuit of me — have you?" the negro asked, with a bitter laugh; and his hand rested upon the hilt of his knife, as though half inclined to draw it.

"The Don asked me to keep him company, and I consented. There's another fish. Take it off the hook."

It was astonishing to see how quick he obeyed. The voice of a white man was a power with him.

"Is Don Ingracia here?" the slave asked, as soon as he had unhooked the fish.

"He is, and two of his overseers with him."

"Let them come," the negro cried, drawing his knife and flourishing it for the first time, while his face began to exhibit all the workings of his hate and rage. "Let them come," he repeated, "and they shall find I can still use my arms. I'll die before I go back to the plantation."

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"Put up your knife," I said, rather sharply, but still coolly. "You won't use it to-day."

He hesitated about obeying, but I turned and looked him full in the face, and then he did as requested.

"Why did you run away from the plantation?" I asked.

"Because one of the overseers struck me with his whip."

"Why did he strike you?"

"I was resting for a moment in the field, and the overseer came up behind me and laid his lash over my back. From that moment I determined to run, for I was not born to be beaten like a dog."

And from his haughty manner I began to think he was right.

"You should have complained to the Don, and not run," I said.

"And I should have been beaten much worse for it," was the answer; and I have no doubt he was correct.

"At any rate, I want you to return with me to the plantation," I remarked, landing another fish, which I motioned the negro to secure, and he obeyed with alacrity.

"No, senor," he said. "I can never return; I should be whipped, and sold to a coffee planter, and beaten like a dog unless I worked day and night. Here I'm free, and here I intend to remain until I die, or am hunted to death."

"You must go with me," I remarked, quietly. "I have come a long distance for you, and I don't want to go back without your company."

"Perhaps the senor can carry me back even if I don't want to go," he said, showing his knife, and looking wicked.

"Put up your weapon," I cried. "You must go with me, and the knife won't benefit you in the least."

The slave laughed most scornfully.

"We are alone," he said, "and with one blow I could end your life as easily as I can crush that worm;" and he struck it with his fist, and killed it of course; but it didn't move me in the least.

"We are alone," I said, "but I am not to be crushed as easily as you think. You must go with me, or I shall be compelled to crush you."

The eyes of the slave flashed fire, and he advanced two or three paces towards me, his knife in hand.

"Stand where you are," I said, quite coolly, drawing my

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revolver and cocking it. "If you come a step nearer, you are a dead slave. I never miss my aim."

The man paused, and glared at me irresolutely, but the revolver pointed directly at his heart made him think of what his fate would be. He came no nearer towards me, but wanted to very much. I could see this by his eyes and his swelling muscles.

"I want to talk plainly with you," I said, "and you must listen patiently. I did not come here with the Don and his party to hurt you, but to serve you, and I will if you behave like a decent slave, as I think you are. You can't escape, and if you stay here you will starve, for you don't even know how to catch fish. You are hungry now — are you not?"

"Very hungry, senor," was the answer.

"I thought so. Make the fire, and we will broil the fish on some stones. We have no salt, but we can eat one meal without."

"I have salt, senor," cried the slave; and the knife was put up.

"That is good. We will have a feast, and while the fire is burning I will tell you what you must do."

"I listen, senor," the negro answered, upon his knees before a pile of dry wood, which he speedily fanned to flames.

"You must go back with me to the plantation," I said. "I will insure that you be treated well, and that this fault is overlooked. You shan't be whipped. If the overseers do so, I will buy you, and take you with me to America. But you shall promise not to run away again."

"Will the senor take the word of a slave?" asked the negro.

"Yes."

"Then, senor, I will do as you want me to, and the Don shall find no reason to complain of me."

I looked at the man's eyes, and thought I could trust him; but I was determined to give him no undue advantage, and take me by surprise.

"Give me your knife," I said.

He did not hesitate, but advanced and handed it to me, with the hilt near my hand.

"You can keep it," I said. "I am satisfied you are honest, and a man of your word."

The negro looked gratified, and resumed his preparations for building a fire with double zeal.

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"How shall I cook the fish, senor?" he asked.

I was now lying under the trees upon the grass, smoking quite contented, and hungry.

"Take that large flat stone," I said, pointing to one that was about the size of a barrel head, although square, and somewhat thicker, "and put it upon the fire, and while it is heating do you dress the fish."

"Yes, senor," he said, as obediently as if I had owned him for years, and had treated him like a friend.

He did what I directed, and by the time the fish were split, the stone was hot enough for our purpose.

"What next, senor?" he asked.

"Put the fish upon the stone, and sprinkle salt upon them."

He did so, and I soon had the satisfaction of seeing the fish cook beautifully with their own fat. Then I waited patiently for my companions to join me, for I knew they would see the smoke from the fire and hasten towards it, and I was correct in my supposition, for just as the fish were cooked to a turn, Don Ingracia, Irenta, and the other overseer burst in upon us.

"Just in time, senors," I said, "for a fish dinner. Sit down. There is enough for all."

"What does this mean?" cried the Don. "We thought you were killed, and that the slave was cooking your body for a grand feast."

"O, bless you, no," I replied. "We have been having a little chat and a little fishing, and Jose is all ready to return home, and not run away in future."

"Cuss him, I'll give him something when he does get back to the plantation that will make him remember this day for a long time. Irenta, put the irons on him."

The slave threw himself upon his knees, and commenced begging for mercy.

"Get up, Jose," I said, "and collect some leaves for the fish No one is going to harm you."

The Don looked astonished, first at me and then at Jose.

"I have made a bargain with Jose," I said, "and have pledged my word that it shall be kept. He is sorry for escaping from so good a master, and will go back and do his duty, and I have pledged my word he shall not be harmed."

"You have?"

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"I have, and what is more, have said that if you still persisted in whipping him, I would purchase him at your own price."

"Do you want him?" asked the Don, carelessly.

"Well, yes, I should like the fellow, for he has got some pluck, and is good-natured," I replied, with no idea of the Don's intentions.

"Ah, well, you may have him, and if he runs away I hope you will flog him well. Is the fish done? for I'm hungry."

I was astonished, but Jose was much more so. He dropped on his knees, seized one of my hands and kissed it most affectionately; and from that time Jose served me as a faithful servant, and continued to do so until his death, which took place some time afterwards, under singular circumstances. But he showed his devotion to me even to the last.

"Get up!" roared the Don to Jose, who was shedding tears over my hand, "and serve the fish; for don't you hear me tell you I am almost starved?"

"I belong to the senor Robert, senor," answered Jose, with dignity. "He commands me, and I obey."

"Well, of all the impudent slaves that I ever did see, you are the worst, and if I owned you should give you a dozen just to make you respect me."

"Serve the Don with the fish," I said; and Jose sprang to obey my orders without the slightest hesitancy.

The fish was cooked to a turn, and because we were hungry it tasted better perhaps than it otherwise would. Two of the fish had all the delicate flavor of brook trout, and the flesh resembled it much, while the fish which appeared like one of the perch family actually tasted like our fresh-water salmon-trout.

The Don was delighted. He forgot all about his past misery, the snake, and the difficulty of hunting negroes. He enjoyed himself immensely. He praised the fish and the cookery, and continued to eat until he could eat no more, and was content to confess that he had not enjoyed a dinner so much for years. Between us all the fish was consumed, and it must be confessed that Jose did not spare it, for he was terribly hungry.

Yet with all the Don's love for piscatorial food, he had never heard that there were fish in the lake, and even Irenta, who had been on the spot some dozen times, never supposed that the finny tribe in the lake was worth hooking. One thing he did not un-

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derstand — the art of fishing with flies and worms; if he had, it is doubtful if he would have tried it.

"Senor Robert," said the Don, "we must come here some day, and have a quiet fish. My people can bring everything we need, during the time we are absent, and what is to prevent us from enjoying ourselves?"

"Nothing, senor; but as you seem to love fish, I wonder why you don't have them upon your table quite often."

"The distance from salt water is one reason," he said.

"But at a slight expense you can have a fish pond, and take them whenever you wish to cast a line."

"How?" he asked, with much interest.

"By making a pond in the field where the cattle are. There is running water and a small meadow between two hills, which can be excavated at slight expense, and filled in with gravel and small stones."

"But the fish?" asked the Don.

"Why, what is to prevent you from catching four or five dozen from this lake, and carrying them in water upon the backs of slaves to the fish pond? In a few years they will increase to such an extent that you can make presents to your friends on feast days."

The Don was delighted. He instantly gave Irenta instructions to have a dozen wooden boxes made, in which to transport the fish as soon as the pond was built, and I agreed to catch all that was wanted, as soon as the Don was ready to receive and care for them. The prospect put the Don in excellent humor, and when we started on our return to the plantation, he wanted me close to his elbow for the purpose of listening to his plans.

We found our horses safe, but the trouble was to take Jose with us, having but four animals. I compromised the matter by telling the slave he could walk to the house, and take his own time about it — a proposition the Don laughed at most outrageously.

"We have taken all this trouble to find the fellow," the Spaniard said, "and do you think he will come back voluntarily? Ten ounces to five that he does not make his appearance at the house."

"I accept the bet," I remarked. "If he is not at the house by breakfast time to-morrow morning, I lose. You hear the wager, Jose?"

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"Yes, senor."

"And I leave it to you to enable me to win it."

"You shall, senor, or I'll lose my life in the attempt."

"You will win," whispered Irenta. "I know something of the negro character, and that fellow means honest."

There were as many as a dozen ladies and gentlemen waiting to greet us on our return, or, I should say, strictly speaking, to welcome the Don; for as he was a moneyed man, and had many relatives, of course they worshipped him — homage which the old gentleman received like one accustomed to adulation, and was gratified at it. All flocked towards him and assisted him to dismount — at least the gentlemen did; while the ladies, many of them rather faded and yellow, but with gorgeous gems upon their fingers, on their hard-looking bosoms, and pendent from their ears, sat upon the settees and waved their fans, and scolded their dear relative because he had ventured upon a slave-hunting expedition.

For a moment I stood unnoticed, and I think I was glad such was the case, for I caught sight of a dashing looking fellow, in the undress uniform of a captain of the Spanish army; and his good looks, clean linen, and spotless dress reminded me. I was not in the exact kind of toilet to make a very deep impression upon the select company assembled. Even Gracia was listening to some words which the captain was addressing her, and I felt a pang of jealousy, the first one I had experienced since I had been acquainted with the lady; for during that time I considered myself so immensely superior to every one she met, that the idea of jealousy had not entered my mind. I could not but confess that the captain was what the ladies would call handsome, and it was my private opinion that the gentleman knew it without being told.

I saw that attention was centred upon the Don, and if he had been rolled in a ditch it would have been all the same, as long as his purse was deep; so I threw the reins of my horse to Irenta, and walked off towards the back of the house, and entered by a side door. Then I dressed, and felt better.

When I entered the parlor every one was talking; but there was a sudden lull in the storm of conversation as we approached, and antiquated dames surveyed me through eye-glasses, and muttered to each other the results at which they arrived regarding

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my appearance. I was so much amused that my impudence did not desert me, and I bore the survey with the composure of a man of the world.

"This is my friend the captain, who saved my daughter," said the Don, by way of a general introduction.

The ladies bowed and fluttered their fans, and I also bent my head slightly, and waited for the next task.

"I am pleased to see the senor," said a voice at my elbow, and turning, I found that it was the handsome captain who had spoken. "A gentleman who has had the happiness to save the life of the Lady Gracia need not wait for an introduction to those present. We open our arms to him, and welcome him as a friend, and one who has already found a place in our hearts."

He extended his hand, and I took it very readily, and as I did so saw that Gracia was regarding me most attentively from the other side of the apartment.

"The ladies, captain, have been awaiting your appearance most impatiently, said the soldier, with a bland smile. "They have heard from the Lady Gracia the wonderful manner in which she escaped from the Virgin, and the kindness with which you treated her after leaving the burning vessel. On my part I thank you for it."

"As a relative?" I asked.

"O, no," he replied, a little confused; "as a Spaniard and a soldier."

Just at that moment the door was thrown open and dinner was announced. I was glad to change the conversation.

"Senor Captain Martenello," cried the Don, "will you give your arm to my daughter. Senor Robert, will you wait upon the Lady Cashbash? Perhaps you can answer some questions which she may put to you during dinner."

Just at that moment my friend Francisco, whom I had not seen since the night before, stole quietly into the room, looking a little timid, as though he feared for his reception. I grasped his hand warmly, and was glad to see him, and cared nothing for the frown which I saw mount upon the Don's brow. I had no doubt he wished him to the devil, but I did not. As a humiliation, Francisco was not assigned to any lady; and although it was intended as a slight, Francisco was immensely delighted; and when we arrived at the table, no place was pointed out for my friend,

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but as there was a vacant chair beside me, I called his attention to it, and he occupied it, and no one said a word in opposition.

The table was loaded with rich silver plate, and enough of it for twenty persons. All was marked with the coat of arms of the Ingracia's, and it looked as though it had been in the family for many years.

Just as we sat down, in walked a priest, almost out of breath from the haste which he had made. He was a little, oily looking man, with eyes which could hardly be seen from the amount of fat upon his face; yet he did not appear like a bad-natured person. He was saluted by those present as Father Domitre, and they seemed to like him.

"You are late, father," said the Don.

"The saints be praised I am not too late. If I had missed the soup I should never have forgiven myself. A blessing upon all here; I have no doubt you need it. If your appetites are all as good as mine, an extra supply of food will be needed. Don't let me disturb one of you. Gracia, my child, I shed tears of joy when I heard you were safe in your father's house, never to leave it unless with a husband. Don't blush, my child, for a husband is a good thing in its way."

The father took his seat at the table, after bestowing his blessing upon every one, and it didn't take him more than a few seconds to do so.

"I started for the house an hour ago," the priest said, arranging a napkin under his chin, as though he was determined to enjoy his feast without soiling his linen, "but an old woman was taken sick, and sent for me in a hurry. I went, and found she had recovered in the most miraculous manner. That's what made me late. Soup, if you please. Did you see the turtle Don Enrique had sent to him last week? It was a monster, and weighed two hundred pounds. Such fat I never saw before. I took soup three times the day I dined there. It was good, but the fish was bad. It had been kept too long."

"I intend to have a fish pond of my own," the Don said, pompously, "and then I shall be able to send you a fresh fish once in a while, on fast days."

"And where will you get the fish from to stock it?" asked the priest.

"From the lake at the Devil's Glen," was the answer.

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The guests looked up in astonishment. The priest crossed himself, and then returned to his soup.

"I was not aware that fish were there," the padre said.

"Nor I until to-day. My young American friend here accompanied me on a slave hunt. At the glen we separated, and when I found him again he was instructing the slave we were in search of how to broil fish upon stones. He had caught the rascal, conquered him, and also caught half a dozen of the sweetest fish I ever tasted, and had set his prisoner at work making a fire and cooking them, and much we wanted them to satisfy our hunger."

All eyes were directed to me by this speech, which I saw did not please the soldier captain. He whispered to Gracia, but she was looking towards me, and did not listen.

"Ah, the Americans are great people," said the priest, with a sigh. "If they would not drive us crazy with the constant fear of fillibusters, I should like the people of the United States above all others. They are hardy, and strike heavy blows when they please to be in earnest. Senor, I drink your health, and let me give you a little fatherly advice. Don't volunteer to accompany the Don upon all of his expeditions, for he is as rash as a soldier; and when I say that, I don't mean to include my young friend, the captain; I have saved his life half a dozen times already."

"How?" asked the Don.

"Why, by accepting your invitations to dinner, and doing most of the eating and some of the drinking, with a little talking."

"But the most singular part of the business to-day is to be told. I made my American friend a present of the slave we recovered; and what does he do but tell the black to be here in the morning, and leaves him," said the Don.

Every one laughed, the military captain loudest of all; but Gracia, dear, faithful little Gracia, did not laugh or even smile; she looked hurt to think that what I had done should be treated with levity, and in her large black eyes I saw signs of tears, but no one else noticed them.

I let them laugh as much as they pleased, and when they had concluded, spoke: —

"I have made one bet already that the slave will be here by morning. I am ready to take others if the gentlemen doubt his fidelity."

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"In the name of the saints put me down for ten ounces," laughed the gay captain.

"I take it," I said.

"And I the same amount," was cried by half a dozen others, all of whose names I entered upon my tablets.

"Senor, I would bet with you," said the priest, "but you Americans are too sharp to lose your money. I should be happy to take half your wagers off your hands, if you are disposed."

"I won't do that," I answered; "but if I win, I will present the church with ten ounces for the purpose of buying a candlestick."

"The church will be much obliged, and I accept of the offering. You shall have my prayers for your success."

"But will that be right?" asked one of the ladies. "If you side against your own countrymen, what becomes of the church?"

"The church, senorita, in this instance, will be governed by success, which is sure to reward my new friend. If any one here is disposed to promise me two candlesticks, I may turn. There is time."

All laughed at the worldly doctrine of the priest, and then turned their attention to the things upon the table, as though appetites were sharpened by the long delayed dinner. Old Lady Cashbash, although destitute of many teeth, did not fail to perform her part in the eating line, and kept me active in attending upon her wants; and while she was eating she did not neglect the drinking part of her duty, for she took hock, champagne, or any other wine that happened in her way.

"I got a letter from Havana this afternoon," Francisco said, after I had helped my lady friend to everything, and piled the dishes up about her like a Parisian street barricade.

"What news?" I asked.

"The firm want me to come to town immediately, and intimate that they should like to see you for the purpose of having a settlement."

"When do you leave for the city?" I asked.

"To-morrow. I am tired of being treated as though I was an intruder; yet I think I have annoyed the Don a little, and that is some satisfaction. Every one at the table imagines that I am not good enough to be here, and yet I suppose I know as much as any of them."

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"You know that I value your society more highly than any person's present, with the exception of Gracia," I said.

"Yes, I know that, and it was not you I alluded to. Now, there's that military dandy, who never saw a fight in his life, and never smelt powder except in firing a salute, thinks he is better than a clerk who earns his money honestly, and pays his debts punctually. Bah! he be hanged."

I laughed at the energetic expressions, and condoled with my friend.

"Keep cool, and don't lose your patience, and to-morrow I will go to Havana with you," I said.

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Then I wouldn't quarrel with even the military dandy," Francisco cried; and to the surprise of every one, he began to grow communicative, and attempted to make himself agreeable; but it was a failure, not being met by the other side; for they all took the hint from the Don, and slighted whom he slighted, and fawned upon those whom he patronized, as society always has done, and probably always will do until money is worthless, or until society changes.

But at length the dinner was concluded, and we arose to go to the drawing-room for coffee. For one moment Captain Martenello turned to speak to the Don, and left Gracia disengaged. That moment I improved, and drew her arm through mine.

"Your companion was attentive," I said; "you hardly raised your eyes to me at dinner."

"For the love of the saints," she cried, earnestly, "don't make me more unhappy by being jealous; I have enough to contend with without your displeasure."

"I am not jealous, Gracia; I did but joke. But, tell me, what is the matter?"

"Not now," she answered, hurriedly. To-night."

"Senor, shall I relieve you of your burden?" asked the captain, extending his arms as though certain I would relinquish the lady to him.

"The burden is so light I will keep it for the present," I said, and passed on with Gracia on my arm.

I looked back, and saw an expression upon the captain's face like a fiend's, it was so dark and threatening. But I passed

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on with a smile, and whispered to Gracia, who, poor girl, did not seem to feel quite at her ease, for some reason I could not account for.

Coffee was handed to the guests in the drawing-room, and animated conversation ensued.

"It's a shame," said the priest, warmly, "for the price of slaves to be so high, when Africa is so well stocked with blacks whose souls will never be saved unless they are transported to this country. If I had the money I would fit out a vessel, and bring a few cargoes to Cuba just as a religious experiment."

"What is to prevent us from stocking our plantations in that manner?" asked Don Enrique, the Spaniard who was engaged in the breeding of bloodhounds for the purpose of hunting fugitives.

"Nothing is to prevent us but finding a suitable person to take charge of a vessel," a planter replied.

"Then here is the one we want," said the Don, laying his hand upon my shoulder. "He has made two successful voyages, and knows the secrets of the trade. We can engage him."

"Then we will consider it settled," one planter remarked.

"Not as far as I am concerned," I said. "I have about decided to leave the trade, and I think that I shall."

"What, leave a business so much money can be made in?" asked all, in a breath. "A young man, too. You must be mad."

"No, I am perfectly sane," I said. "I have seen so much suffering on board of a slaver I have resolved to quit the business."

I looked towards Gracia for her approval, and she did approve the course which I had taken by a smile of angelic sweetness.

"O," said the Don, surly and with a frown, "if the senor does not choose to go, there are others who would be delighted to get the chance. We don't want men to work contrary to their wishes."

"Ho, ho," muttered Francisco, "you are treading on the old gentleman's corns now, and he shows his temper. As long as you were with him all was well."

I thought the Don was ungenerous, and I felt angry at his want of gratitude.

I talked with the senorita, and listened willingly to Father Domitre's stories until it was time to retire, when the company separated and repaired to their rooms.

"I would like one word with you before you sleep," said the

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Don, after a moment's hesitation; and he stood near the door of my room, light in hand.

"Certainly, walk in;" and the old gentleman accepted my invitation.

"Now," I said, taking a seat and lighting a cigar, "I am willing to hear all you can communicate to me."

"I am sorry you refused the offer we made you," he said, at length. "I certainly expected you would accept."

"So I would if I was poor."

"Father Domitre thinks that you have some inducement for remaining on shore," the old man said, in an insinuating tone.

"Does he really think so?" I asked, and laughed carelessly as though such was not the case.

"Yes; I told him it must be a mistake. Sailors seldom care about attachments."

"Why should they?" I asked; and wanted to kick the old man for his impudence.

"I am glad to hear you talk thus," the Don said, hastily, "because I feared you had formed some attachment for my daughter, and you know —"

He hesitated, and seemed at loss for a word. I looked at him steadily, but said nothing.

"You know she is an only child, and has large expectations," the Don managed to get out.

"I presume so," I answered.

"Yes, she will inherit all of my wealth, and in such case you know I must make an advantageous match for her."

"I will ask one question," I said. "If I consented to take charge of a slaver, would it help my cause as an applicant for your daughter's hand?"

"Certainly not, senor," was the prompt answer. "It would never do for my family to ally itself to a slaver. Not but I have the highest respect for you and the trade, but you can see how I am surrounded by laws which I cannot violate without losing caste."

"I see, I see," I muttered, with a calm face, but with internal rage which I could hardly subdue.

"And now to come to the point," the Don said, laying his hand upon my arm as though to command my utmost attention. "Captain Martenello, a gentleman who has good birth, powerful family,

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and large fortune to recommend him, has this evening proposed for the hand of Gracia, and I have accepted him."

"And what says the lady?" I asked, hastily.

"We trust, with your assistance, that the lady will accept," the Don said, with a complacent smile.

"How? My assistance?"

"Yes, yours. You know that you have some influence with her, on account of the service which you rendered. She will listen to what you have to say. Persuade her to marry the captain, and the day she is married I will give you one thousand dollars."

I sprang from my chair with the intention of committing an assault, but I suddenly recollected where I was and what I was contending for; so instead of throwing the Don out of the window, and breaking his bones, I clapped him upon the shoulder and shook hands with him fiercely.

"There, that will do," he said, with a look of pain as he withdrew his hand from mine and rubbed it. "You Americans have so much strength it is wonderful. No wonder you fight well. You accept — do you?" the Don asked, after a pause.

"Why should I not?"

"I will tell you why I thought I should have some difficulty in persuading you. After dinner Captain Martenello spoke to me for a few minutes, and made his offer. I accepted, of course. Then he told me he thought you had set your eyes upon Gracia, and that she had some friendly feeling for you."

"How much he must have been mistaken," I said.

"So I told him, but I could not laugh him out of the idea. I told him you would be much more likely to marry one of your own countrywomen."

I nodded.

"At length the captain told me he would give a thousand dollars if you would advocate his suit with my daughter, as he thinks you must have some influence with her, having saved her life, which, of course, you was bound to do for humanity's sake."

"He made the offer — did he?" I asked, resolved to be even with him some time for the insult.

"He did, and the money is yours as soon as the wedding takes place."

I saw a picture move, as though some one near it was surprised and indignant.

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"Let us understand each other," I said, quietly. "To-morrow I must go to the city to settle some business. In a few days I will return and do all I can to make your daughter happy. Tell the captain so, and that he must have no suspicions of me, even if I am seen conversing with the lady quite often. You understand me?"

"To be sure I do;" and the Don arose, and with a good night left me.

The next moment Gracia appeared from behind a huge picture, set in the wall, tears flowing from her eyes, and her countenance agitated.

"You have heard all, Gracia?" I asked.

"All," she answered. "O, Robert, what shall we do?"

"I will tell you presently; but first answer me a question. Do you like Captain Martenello?"

"O, no; I detest him. I love but you, and yet the saints pardon you, I heard you consent to receive a thousand dollars for advocating the captain's cause."

"And did you think I was in earnest, my darling?" I asked, placing my arm around her waist.

"I do not know what to think. I'm fearful you have tired of me, and yet if you knew all you would not be so;" and as she spoke she hid her face on my breast, and laughed and cried alternately.

I did not ask for her secret, for I suspected it; but it only made her dearer to me, so in a few minutes I had soothed her, and she was able to listen to me with composure.

"I agreed to the proposal advanced by your father," I said, "for the purpose of being near you, and thus making some plans for the future. I suspected his pride would be too strong to give me the prize I coveted, for, you know, his gratitude is slight. I must win you by another method."

"But how?" Gracia asked, her large black eyes beaming with interest.

"Are you content to go with me at all times, and to all places?" I asked.

She put her arms about my neck, and kissed me most affectionately.

"Leave friends and fortune?" I continued.

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"I shall find all in you;" and her head was laid upon my shoulder in woman's true confidence.

"Then in a few days you shall be mine, unless my plans fail me. In the mean time manifest no love for me."

"No, I won't;" and she withdrew her arms from my neck with a coquettish smile.

"In public," I cried, and replaced her arms.

"O, in public—I understand. I thought you meant at all times;" and the little witch laughed, but I stopped it with a kiss.

"Pretend to the captain that you do not absolutely hate him, and leave the rest to me. To-morrow I shall go to Havana."

"And leave me?" she asked, with a look of alarm.

"Only for a day or two, and then I shall return, and hope never to be parted again."

"But I shall be lonely," Gracia murmured.

"And so shall I, but there is no help for it."

Until an early hour in the morning we discussed our plans, and to all of them Gracia agreed, and promised to be governed by me. When we parted it was with a tender embrace, and a hope for better times.

While we were at breakfast in the morning, I could see by the bearing of Captain Martenello towards me, that he and the Don had conversed together, and settled matters to their satisfaction, and that I was looked upon as rather a harmless, good-natured sort of fellow, and one who should be encouraged. I did not attempt to undeceive them, for it was just the opinion I desired they should form of me for the successful issue of my plans.

While we were eating, and the Don was pompously displaying his wealth and patronage, the major-domo entered with a grin upon his black face.

"Senor, the slave Jose who ran away has come back, and wants to see the senor Robert:"

All were astonished, and were inclined to disbelieve it.

"I hope the gentlemen will all be ready to pay their bets," I said. "I leave for Havana this forenoon, and may not see you again."

"Don't forget the church, my son," whispered the priest. "Remember you had my prayers for the success of your wagers."

"Fear nothing, holy father. As soon as they pay I'll give

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the church her dues. But you must make all show the color of their gold."

"I'll excommunicate them if they don't," was the reply; and just at this moment in came Jose, looking tired, and almost destitute of clothing. The Don had sent for him to be certain there was no deception.

"It's Jose, sure enough," muttered the Don, drawing ten ounces from his pocket, and sending them to me on a silver salver. "I've lost, senor, and there's the money."

"There's mine," said the captain.

"And there's the church's," I replied, handing the priest the ten ounces I had promised him.

He pocketed them so quick I hardly had a chance to see where he put the money.

After breakfast I found Jose, and gave him a suit of clothes, and then borrowing a volante and two horses from the Don, all three of us embarked and started for Havana.

"Now," said Francisco, after we had got fairly started, with Jose driving, proud of his position and new master, "what are your plans?"

"To go to Havana."

"And give up the lady?"

"Not quite."

"You know the Don intends she shall marry the captain?"

"He told me so."

"Shall you submit?"

"I think not."

"Then I'm satisfied. After all you have done for that man; after all your sacrifices, to have the old fool turn up his nose at you, is a little too bad. Have her!" cried Francisco, "I'll be cussed if I wouldn't take the girl if I had to tear down the house. She belongs to you — don't she?"

"I hope that she will," I replied.

"But it won't do to marry her in this country," my friend said, after a pause. "You would be assassinated in less than a week after the event. The Don has money, and could hire a dozen bravos to dog your steps. We must think of some other plan."

"I have one," I replied, "and I hope that it will work."

"Name it."

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"I intend to buy or charter the Coquette. Castro de Lego is but ten miles from the residence of the Don. I shall ship a crew and have everything ready, and what is to prevent us from being off some morning quite early?"

Francisco uttered a shout of delight, and hurled his hat at the head of the astonished Jose, who turned round and grinned at such a display of pleasantry.

CHAPTER XVI.

SETTLING A VOYAGE. — MY SHARE, AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE. — A CHARTER. — A COOL RECEPTION. — A DUENNA. — A NAP. — AN ELOPEMENT.

We arrived at Havana about four o'clock in the afternoon, and drove straight to the counting-room of Messrs. Riejo & Neali. The senior member of the firm was just about leaving the office for his country residence. He gave me a warm greeting, and invited me into his private room, while Francisco paid his respects to his brother clerks, and gossipped of his doings during his absence.

"Be seated," said the senior Riejo, pointing to a chair, "and then we will talk for a few minutes on business."

"I suppose you are anxious to know how our accounts stand," he said, passing me a cigar.

I bowed, and waited for him to proceed.

"I can tell you in a few words. We compromised with the owners of the Virgin, and allowed them one hundred thousand dollars for their share of the treasure which was saved, and very glad they were to get it. That left us two hundred thousand dollars. We decided to keep one hundred thousand, and divide the balance between yourself and crew. The slaves sold well, and those which you captured we only claimed one third of; so that I can safely say that your individual share of the profits of the voyage will amount to about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. A pretty good four months' trip, and the most profitable one that ever reached Cuba, in our line, you understand."

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I was amazed and almost confounded. I had not anticipated more than one hundred thousand dollars at the utmost; and I thought with joy, that, with the diamonds and precious stones which I had secured about my person, I was in reality worth half a million dollars, and all earned in less than two years' time.

"Is the result satisfactory?" asked the senor Riejo, with a smile.

"Perfectly," I replied.

"Then to-morrow you shall receive the money in gold, and let me advise you to ship it home in the United States frigate Growler, which is lying in the harbor, and will sail for Boston in a few days. I understood Francisco to write that you had no desire to continue in the business longer."

"Such is my intention," I replied.

"I am sorry to lose you, but women conquer all; and, as the match is so advantageous, I cannot advise you to forego it."

"I don't understand you," I said.

"Why, it is reported that Don Ingracia is about to give you the hand of his daughter for saving her life. I was surprised at it, for the old fellow is intensely mean, and has been looking for an alliance with a nobleman."

"And still is looking for one," I replied, with some bitterness. "He has even had the impudence to ask my advice on the subject, and he did so that I might have no hopes of obtaining the lady's hand."

"And of course you abandoned all hope at once?" the senor asked, with a peculiar smile.

"Of course," I answered, and smiled in return.

"Ah, it is the best plan, for the Don is powerful, and might do you a mischief if you annoyed him. He could find plenty of tools to work with, so it is best to be on the safe side."

"But suppose he had no opportunity to return me any little favor I might show him?" I asked.

"If such is the case, why go on, and the saints prosper you. Only don't let me know anything of your purpose, for I must make friends instead of enemies. My business is one that is carried on secretly, but people have the power of annoying me."

Perhaps my looks expressed the disappointment I felt, for the senor said, —

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"You have some favor to ask me?"

"I want to charter the Coquette for two months, and would pay well for the vessel," I said.

"For Africa?"

"Perhaps I may go there. At any rate I will guarantee that the schooner shall be returned to any port you may name within three months; for that time I will pay well."

"I will think the matter over," said the senor Riejo, "and let you know in the morning."

The next morning he informed me that I could have the schooner for two months without any charge.

"But you must man and provision her, and pledge your word that she shall be returned to the port of Castro de Lego in good order," he said.

"I will do that willingly," I answered, with a gratified look.

We proceeded to settle my accounts, and then the sum of one hundred and fifty-five thousand dollars was paid me in doubloons. This large amount, with the exception of five thousand dollars for necessary expenses, Francisco boxed up for me, and before night it was snug on board of the United States ship Growler. I did not tell the captain, whom I was introduced to by the United States consul, that I had made the money by running cargoes of negroes, for I was fearful the information might have hurt his feelings. It did seem a little curious, though, that a government vessel should carry home the gold which was accumulated in a trade that the ship was sent to suppress. In fact, I suppose the captain did not care how I came by the gold, and I presume he wished it was his own with all his heart, for a naval officer can get through with a large pile of money while upon a foreign station.

In one of the boxes I would have secured my belt of diamonds, but feared that some blundering custom-house official would overhaul the treasure in the United States, and confiscate the stones on the ground of smuggling.

As soon as my money was safe on board I felt a little easier, but still had much business to do. It was necessary I should ship a crew for the Coquette; so, taking Francisco with me, we went to quarters where seamen frequented, and I had the good luck to find the crew of a Boston bark which had been con-

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demned at Havana, while the captain had paid his debts with the foretopsail. That is, he had run off one night and taken what money he could collect with him, and left the crew to whistle for their pay.

The men were on the consul's hands, and that official was desirous of getting rid of them as soon as possible, and I believe most consuls are of the same mind. I liked the appearance of the mate and second mate very much. They belonged to Cape Cod, and had sailed together for years. The first mate's name was Prentice, and the second mate's name was Davis. They gave a good account of the crew, and said they were men who could be relied upon in storm or calm. They were out of money, the yellow fever season was about to commence, and they were tired of looking for a ship. They could have entered on board of the Growler, but didn't like the service of Uncle Sam. As some had families at the Cape, they were most anxious to return home.

I told them what I wanted, and what I wanted them for, although I said nothing about the intended elopement; but Prentice and Davis were a little suspicious that I expected to engage in the slave trade, and that they would not do at any rate.

"Look you," I said, "I want you to act as mate and second mate until the schooner reaches Boston. Then I shall leave, and with six men you must navigate her back to Castro de Lego, put her in good order, and restore everything on board as you find it. I shall give the mate one hundred dollars per month, the second mate fifty dollars, and the men twenty-five each. But I must have obedience and discipline, and I will have it."

The mates looked at each other a moment. Such wages they could not withstand.

"We are ready to go on board in half an hour," they said.

I gave each half a month's wages, took them before the consul, and shipped them in form, and glad enough the official was. Then I chartered a coasting schooner and sent my men on board, stocked the vessel with a few casks of bread, salt pork, beef, beans, rice, flour, and such things as I should want to feed the crew on the passage to the States, paid for everything, and saw the coaster start for Castro de Lego with my new crew as merry as crickets; each man having spliced the main

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brace several times to keep in good humor, and all having enough tobacco to last for a month.

I gave Mr. Prentice a few directions what to do when he arrived, and he promised to set the men at work without delay in filling water casks and in landing those which we should not want, so that nothing could be found on board to excite suspicion in case we were overhauled by an English ship of war, as I did not intend to run from any one.

After I had attended to all this business and paid my bills, I received my charter from the firm, which gave me full possession of the schooner for three months. Then tired with my day's work, I repaired to a hotel, where I had told Jose to wait for me with the volante. I found the faithful fellow perfectly contented with his situation, and ready to start for San Philippe at a moment's notice; but as it was late I concluded to remain over for the night and leave early in the morning, and just as I had come to this wise conclusion, Francisco found me and said that he had got leave of absence for a few days, and would remain with me until I left the island.

I was very glad of this, for he could prove of great benefit to me at the port of Castro de Lego, being much better acquainted than I was. We agreed that I should carry him to Don Ingracia, and from thence he would ride horseback to the port, and have everything ready for me to sail at a moment's warning. We ate a late supper, and as both of us were tired, did not venture upon the Plaza for fear we should meet with some adventure which would interfere with the business before us. So we sat and smoked, and drank light wine, until nine o'clock. We then separated for the night, with the understanding that we should start at daylight the next morning.

Jose was prompt, and had the volante drawn up in front of the hotel just at daylight, and after a substantial breakfast of chickens and eggs and tomatoes, we were off for San Philippe. Nothing of especial note occurred on the road, and we reached the residence of Don Ingracia about three o'clock in the afternoon, in time to dress for dinner.

Francisco refused to remain at the Don's house over night, much to the Don's gratification, I have no doubt, for he very kindly consented that fresh horses should be furnished for the volante, and I let Jose drive my friend to Castro de Lego the same afternoon.

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The Don received me with civility, but I can't say with much cordiality, and I thought I read in his eyes that he could have cheerfully sustained himself if my absence had been prolonged for an indefinite period. I pretended to take no notice of his manner, and soon commenced talking with him about his fish pond and as it was something that was to add to his grandeur he lent me a ready ear, and became enthusiastic for me to commence the work immediately. But that I was resolved not to do on any account.

All this time I had not seen Gracia, nor heard a word of her. I concluded I would ask respecting her whereabouts, for I was anxious.

"Donna Gracia is well, I trust," I said.

"She is quite well, senor," was the answer. "In regard to the pond —" the Don continued, as though to lead me from the subject, but I was not to be led from it.

"I presume she is at home," I hinted.

"O, yes, certainly, she is at home. But the pond should —"

"I shall then pay my respects to her at dinner," I said.

"Of course, if you choose."

He spoke like a man who would rather I should not, but I was determined to, nevertheless.

"Captain Martenello is still stopping here," I said.

"O, yes, of course," was the answer.

But the Don did not say where he was, or how he was employed.

I went to my room, which the Don was kind enough to reserve for me, simply because no one wanted it, laboring as it did under a bad reputation. I dressed for dinner, and just as I left my room Gracia quitted hers. I sprang towards her, but was stopped by the sudden appearance of an old woman, who was too cross-looking to merit a passing glance. The old thing made sail, and bore down upon me with a face as grim as the lower tier of a line of battle ship's guns; and, faith, her black snapping eyes glanced suspiciously at me, as though I was about to take Gracia in my arms, and fly out of the window, and leave the plantation forever. I saw that I must reduce sail and become circumspect, therefore I bowed as politely as a reefer to his captain when fearing punishment for his monkey-shines.

"Senor Robert," said Gracia, looking as though she was de

sirous of throwing her arms around my neck, but restrained herself. "I am pleased to see you back to San Philippe; you have been gone two days."

The old woman pricked up her ears at the conversation, and advanced. Gracia appeared to notice her for the first time.

"Senor Robert," my little darling said, "this is Donna Martha, whom my father has engaged as a duenna, and whom you must be very kind to."

The old woman bobbed her head like a ten-gun brig in a head sea, and said, "O!" But that "O," meant much. It said as plainly as possible, "I have been engaged to watch you, and I mean to do my duty. So don't think I shall sleep while you are present."

"I am extremely happy to make the acquaintance of so excellent a lady," I said. "I trust we shall be good friends."

The old witch grunted, and didn't appear very sanguine about it.

We walked a few steps along the wide entry, when Gracia suddenly stopped.

"O, Martha, I have left my watch upon my dressing table. Go and bring it, if you please."

The duenna turned to perform the errand, but as soon as she had entered the room, two heads might have been seen together, attracted by laws which govern all solid substances, and half a dozen smothered kisses were taken with the rapidity of lightning.

"How shall I get rid of her?" Gracia asked, in a whisper. "She sleeps in my room, and keeps close to me at all times."

I muttered a curse at the information. It was not exactly what an impatient man desired to put up with.

"Does she drink wine?" I whispered.

"Yes, she has a bottle of wine or spirit in my room, and every night drinks half a glass for the purpose of producing sleep."

"Then I have her on the hip. Go to the table without me. I will linger behind. But where is the bottle kept?"

"In a chest of drawers — the lower one;" and at this instant the duenna made her appearance.

"There is no watch there, senorita," said the duenna.

Gracia seemed surprised, and looked at her dress belt and laughed.

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"I have it here. I am so sorry I troubled you."

"O," grunted the old woman. She looked at me as though I was the means of sending her on the errand, and I guess I was. At any rate, I did not complain because Gracia was so forgetful.

Pretending that I had left something in my room, I allowed the ladies to walk down stairs without me. I had something in my valise I wanted, and it was a small phial containing a drug which Cringy had given me upon the coast of Africa, and recommended as something that was excellent to produce sleep. I had tried it once, and a few drops had set me into such a sound slumber I did not awake for ten hours. It was very powerful, but perfectly harmless unless an overdose was taken.

With the phial I gained the room occupied by Gracia, and found the bottle the duenna loved so much. It was half full of brandy, as I suspected, and in the spirit I poured a few drops of the drug, replaced the bottle, and stole from the apartment unobserved by any one. I thought if the old lady took a strong drink of it, she would not pay much attention to a conversation between Gracia and myself, but I was really fearful something would happen to spoil my well-laid scheme.

In the dining-room the soup was just being served. Captain Martenello was at the table. The captain smiled and bowed to me, but I knew how much he meant by it, although I returned him smile for smile, and even exchanged a few pleasant words with him.

The dinner, like most of the Don's dinners, passed off heavily enough. I was glad when the meal was concluded, for I longed to be somewhere else. I quietly withdrew from the table, and was happy when night approached, so that I could have an interview with Gracia, and see how my drug worked upon the duenna, whose eyes were as restless as a cat's during dinner, and for watching me she had been expressly engaged.

I retired to my room early, and was glad when I heard Gracia and the duenna enter their apartment, and bar the door as though fearful it would be entered by some person during the night. I waited patiently, but I had to wait an hour before the blushing face of my darling appeared behind the picture.

"Is she asleep?" I asked.

"The saints be praised, she is, and snoring like an earthquake. It was a long time before she went off, and I feared that the drug

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would not exert its influence. She started up every few minutes and stared around wildly, as though she suspected the trick that had been put upon her; but I pretended to be asleep, and she went off at last. What am I to do?"

"I will tell you," I replied; and then I kissed her for being such a good girl during my absence, and swore I had been like the needle to the pole, faithful and true, while I was at Havana.

And she believed me, and I felt quite happy to think I was able to give such a good account of myself, and without resorting to subterfuge. And I told her what I had done, and we laid our plans for an elopement, and not until daylight did we conclude our long and interesting conversation, and then the lady stole to her room, where the duenna was sleeping soundly and making unmelodious music with her nose. Gracia felt no compunctions of conscience at leaving her father, for she considered I had the best claim upon her affections, and I thought so too.

The next day I started in the volante, with Jose to drive, to see how matters were progressing on board the Coquette. I found Mr. Prentice and the men were fast getting ready for sea, as they had landed everything which was of the lumber order, and stowed it away in storehouses which Francisco had provided on shore. The stores were all on board from the vessel which I had chartered at Havana, and the Coquette looked as neat as waxwork, with her holy-stoned deck as white as snow.

Francisco, with an eye to my comfort and the gratification of Gracia, had purchased some ten dozen fowls, eggs in abundance, and large quantities of fruit, which were carefully put on board and were ready for use.

"How soon can you be ready for sea?" I asked of Mr. Prentice.

"We are all ready now, sir, with the exception of a few casks of water, and those I shall fill this afternoon, besides giving the rigging a little setting up, for it's rather slack by carrying sail."

"Then be all ready to start at a moment's notice," I said, determined to carry off Gracia that very night. "When we leave it will be in a hurry."

"All right, sir. I'm ready at any time. I have never axed what our business is, but I s'pose I shall know in good time. As long as it don't place my neck in danger I don't care."

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"Your neck is perfectly safe," I replied. "The only neck to be endangered is mine, and I'll run the risk, for the object is a worthy one."

The mate looked puzzled, but asked no more questions.

"Do the men seem satisfied?" I asked.

"Well, I should think they might, sir. They haven't seen so much money as you gin 'em for many months, and if the men had but a tot of liquor once in a while in port, they wouldn't care about stepping on dry land agin for some months."

I took the hint, and when I went on shore purchased a barrel of wine, not of the best brand though, and sent word to the mate to take charge of it, and serve out liquor to the men twice a day. This was something so entirely unexpected, the men swore I was the best captain who ever stepped foot upon a quarter-deck, and that they didn't care a cuss if they did go hunting for slaves. But I had no such intentions.

In the afternoon I started for home, telling Francisco to look for me by daylight the next morning.

"Jose," I said, while riding towards San Philippe, "you will do anything I ask you to."

"Yes, senor," was the ready answer.

"Can you get a volante with two horses for me to-night? I don't want a single person to know I am going away. I shall start about twelve o'clock."

The negro thought a moment.

"I can do it, master," he said, at length. "The slaves round the stable don't know much, and are lazy dogs. They had rather be dancing than tending their work. The people have a party to-night on the senor Enrique's plantation. Our folks all want to go. I'll tell them that I'll take care of the stable, and they'll go and leave me in charge."

"That will do, Jose. As soon as you see that the Don and his family have retired for the night, put two of the best horses to the volante and drive to the avenue. Then come under my window, and wait until you hear from me. But above all things, let no one suspect what you are about to do."

The negro promised obedience, and I had no doubt but that he would serve me faithfully.

During the afternoon I completed my preparations for depar-

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ture, and hinted to Gracia to do the same; but the old duenna kept such watch over the young lady it was impossible for her to collect her dresses, or make any of those arrangements which were so necessary for a hasty flight.

I waited impatiently for night. I feared something would occur to deprive me of the prize which I was so anxious to possess; but at an early hour Gracia complained of a slight headache, and retired to her chamber after receiving the usual blessing, which her parent bestowed, apparently with more feeling than he was apt to do upon like occasions. Old Martha followed the young lady, looking unusually vicious and wakeful, as though she was determined to make up with watchfulness what she had lost by sleep the night before.

I did not lay down, but extinguished my light, and waited patiently for the signal which should inform me that Martha was asleep. The house was quiet, and not a soul seemed to be stirring. Don Ingracia had retired an hour before, but Captain Martenello had conversed with him for a few minutes and then sought his apartment. I feared the soldier suspected something, for I did not like his looks.

At twelve o'clock precisely I heard the voice of Gracia.

"Don't make the least noise," she said, "for Martha has just fell into a deep sleep. She was unusually restless, and complained that her drink tasted bitter, and asked me to try some and see if it was not so. What shall I do, for I am so nervous I can't move?"

I soothed her for a few moments, and then directed her to pack up what clothes she desired, but to leave all of her jewels, as I was wealthy enough to purchase such as she wished. She returned to her room to obey me, and while she was absent I carefully shoved back the window and looked out; but the night was rather dark, and the trees so shaded the house I could see nothing.

"Jose," I whispered.

"Here, senor," answered the faithful fellow. "I am all ready, and have been waiting an hour."

"And the volante?"

"That is also ready, senor."

"Good! Take my valise which I shall lower to you, and keep a sharp watch for the servants."

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"No fear of them, senor. The stablemen have all gone to the dance, and won't be home till daylight."

I lowered my valise from the window, and then went to Gracia. She thrust into my arms a few dresses, and such things as she wanted.

"I dare not stop for more," she said. "Martha is restless, and talks in her sleep. If she should awaken all is lost."

But I was determined that Gracia should not suffer, while on board of the schooner, for the want of proper clothing; and in spite of her remonstrances visited her chamber, and found such articles as I thought were necessary. But before I left, I turned and looked at Martha. She was lying on her back and talking while she slept, but it was so incoherent I did not stop to listen.

I took all of Gracia's clothes, packed them in a shawl, and threw them out of the window, where they were taken charge of by the faithful Jose, who waited for me patiently.

"Now, Gracia," I said, "we must take our departure. We must pass through the corridors and out of the side door. If we meet any one be sure that you speak not a word, but leave all to me."

She promised compliance, and carefully opening the door I stepped forth. We took no light for fear of attracting attention, for I have before alluded to the fact that some of the servants slept in the hall on settees, while others rolled upon the floor, without pillow or blanket. These we would have to pass, and a light would have revealed more than was desirable.

I took Gracia's hand and led her along the corridor, stepping carefully for fear we should stumble over the prostrate bodies of the slaves; but we gained the stairs, and descended them without meeting any one, or making a noise. Then I thought I was safe; but just as I was hurrying towards the door which we were to make our exit from, one of the negroes started up from a settee, and appeared to listen to our movements.

"Is that you, Pedro?" the fellow asked.

I made no answer, and pressed Gracia's hand for her to keep silent.

"You must not try and play your tricks on this child," the slave said. "I am wide awake and on the watch."

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I still remained quiet, and hardly breathed, so fearful was I the fellow would pursue his investigations.

"I guess it wasn't Pedro, after all," the slave said, stretching himself upon the settee again; but at any rate he was disposed to make all sure, and taking his shoe, or something that was handy, hurled it in our direction.

The missile flew past us and struck the head of a negro who was sleeping on a settee on the other side of the entry. As the fellow's skull was thick, it only aroused him a little, and rolling over, was soon asleep again. In a few minutes all was quiet, and by the heavy breathing of the negroes I judged they were all slumbering once more.

Then we walked towards the door, but just as we reached it, Gracia struck her foot against a slave, and the shock was so sudden she uttered a cry of surprise. The negro jumped upon his feet with a yell of fear, for he supposed the house was invaded by robbers, and that his throat was to be cut in the shortest possible time, and without the slightest ceremony. I heard the other slaves start up and cry out, and I knew that there was no time to lose, or to stand for ceremony. The negro whom Gracia had stepped upon, had caught her garments in his hands and was holding on to them tightly, so the lady whispered to me; but the instant after I received the information, the slave measured his length upon the floor, the effects of a heavy blow between his eyes, for I had judged where his head was, and had aimed accordingly.

The fellow yelled like a demon as he struck the floor. In an instant his companions were in commotion, and were asking each other to light lamps, and what was the matter. The explanation, I thought, would come soon enough; and catching Gracia in my arms, I squared away for the door in a hurry. I luckily found it open, and out I went and closed it after me.

"Jose," I said, for I did not see that important individual, owing to his color and the darkness of the night.

"Here, senor," was the answer; and Jose arose from the grass where he had been lying at full length.

"Lead the way to the volante," I said. "We must move in a hurry, for the house is alarmed."

Jose started on a run for the vehicle, and I followed him with

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Gracia in my arms, as fast as possible. As I did so, I looked back and saw that several lights were burning in the house, and also heard a confused murmur, as though half a dozen people were talking at the same time, and none listening.

We were compelled to run for a dozen rods before we reached the volante; but as soon as we gained it, Jose sprang to the heads of the horses, while I lifted Gracia into the carriage, and jumped in after her. She was hardly conscious, so frightened was she.

For a moment I glanced back. I could hear the negroes shouting to each other on the piazza, and the Don raving. Then Jose let the whip fall upon the horses, and we were off at a ten-knot rate of speed, through the winding avenue, through the gate, and out upon the level road, where the carriage wheels and the horses' hoofs awoke the echoes of the quiet night, and revealed to those in the house the direction which we had taken.

I folded Gracia in my arms, and whispered words of comfort in her ears; but she did not heed me, for her tears were falling fast, and I had no doubt she was thinking of the home which she had left, and the rage of her father.

While toiling slowly up a hill, about three miles from the Don's house, I looked back and listened to see if we were pursued. I could hear nothing, but Jose's ears were more quick, for he started hastily, gathered up the reins, and used the whip most vigorously.

"What is the matter, Jose?" I asked.

"The hounds," he answered, in a whisper. "The Don has let loose the dogs, and they are on our trail."

The intelligence did not dismay me. I was armed with a pair of revolvers, well loaded, and a bowie knife, and considered that I was a match for eight or ten of the animals, at least as long as I remained in the volante. I ordered Jose to let the horses walk up the hill, and thus save their wind and strength, and calmly awaited the onset.

Our horses toiled slowly up the hill, but before we gained the summit the bays of the hounds were terribly distinct, as they pressed on after us with noses close to the ground, uttering their discordant music, and licking their chops with the anticipation of a battle, or worrying some human being to death. I was so fearful Gracia would hear the dogs and become terrified, I would willingly have given thousands of dollars if I could

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have been warranted free of their presence. But as we neared the top of the hill, the noise of the dogs could no longer be concealed from Gracia, so she raised her head and listened most attentively.

"It is nothing," I said, folding my arms around her, "but some dogs chasing a negro. We shall soon be rid of them."

I don't know whether she really thought as I wanted her to or not, but she nestled her head once more upon my shoulder, and closed her eyes as though trying to sleep.

Just as we gained the top of the hill the dogs were within five rods of us, giving tongue most savagely, and eager upon the scent. Jose gathered the reins in his hands, and was about to apply his whip to the animals which he drove, when I gently released myself from Gracia's embrace, and laid a hand upon the negro's shoulder. He started as though he felt the teeth of the dogs in his flesh. I caught his hand and checked the horses, much to his astonishment.

"We must kill those dogs here," I said, "and not let them get the better of us while going down hill. We should lose command of the horses."

"As you please, senor," the man answered; "but the hounds will fight well."

"I know it. Attend to the horses and keep them quiet. I will take care of the dogs."

The dogs were cunning, for they had divided their forces, one on each side of the volante, and turned their whole attention to the negro, as though he was the only one who was to be warred against.

"Save me, senor," cried Jose, turning his dark face towards me, and shivering with terror.

I did not wait to be called upon twice, but leaning forward, put the muzzle of a pistol close to the head of the dog, and fired. The next instant there was a loud yelp, and down tumbled the animal with a ball through his brain.

"The other one, too," cried Jose, kicking at the remaining hound with his huge feet, although there was great danger the dog would get a mouthful of toes by the operation.

As Jose spoke, the hound made a spring and reached the driver's seat, to which he clung with his fore-paws, and made frantic attempts to bite the slave; but the latter shifted his position with

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a sudden jump, and as he did so started the horses; they plunged down the hill with fearful speed, and their abrupt movement threw me to the bottom of the volante; but, luckily, without discharging my pistol, which I held on to tightly as my best friend.

"Hold the horses, Jose," I shouted.

"I would, senor, but the dog, whom the saints curse, is snapping at me," was the answer.

The negro feared the hound more than he did breaking his neck by being thrown from the carriage; for, from the time he was able to work, he had been taught that bloodhounds were terrible animals, and that one of them was able to overcome a dozen negroes. Therefore, instead of watching the horses, the slave preferred keeping his eyes upon the dog; and I must confess the brute did not look inviting, as he snapped at us and struggled to get into the volante, yet was unable to do so, owing to the pace at which the horses were going. Momentarily I expected the craft would founder, for we were carrying too much sail for the course we were steering; but as soon as I picked myself up, and saw that Gracia was uninjured, and was holding on for dear life, I thought, in case of a wreck, the dog would soon play the deuce with us, so ended his career in the same manner that the other one was finished, much to the joy of the negro, who uttered a shout which could have been heard for half a mile, before he gathered up his reins or made any attempt to stop the horses. The consequences were, the wheels on the starboard side struck a rock, and for a moment the volante was suspended in the air like Mahomet's coffin, and then, with a surge, over it went.

I had seen the impending danger in time to put up my pistol, throw my arms around Gracia, and when we capsized jumped with her, and luckily struck the earth without the slightest injury to either of us; but I caught a glimpse of Jose performing half a dozen somersaults, with the ruins of the carriage revolving around him like planets around the sun; and then the horses suddenly stopped, for there was no more mischief to do just at that moment.

"Are you hurt?" asked Gracia, in an anxious tone.

"Not in the least. And you?"

"Am I not in your arms?" she asked, as though she was quite safe there from all danger.

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I kissed her, and went to the assistance of Jose, whom I found mixed up with the wreck of the vehicle.

"Are you injured?" I asked, clearing away some of the wreck.

"No, senor; I think not," was the answer, and the slave felt of his limbs. Suddenly he bent his head to the ground and whispered, "We are pursued, senor, by people from the house, but we can avoid them by leaving the road, and finding shelter in the wood."

I had half a mind to do so; but I feared we should lose our way in the bushes, and miss reaching port by daylight, in which case I should stand a poor chance of accomplishing my object; for it seemed quite probable to me that the Don would collect a sufficient force to cut off my retreat, and hem me in on all sides, and my treatment, under such circumstances, I imagined, would not be of the lightest kind, especially if Captain Martenello had command. I thought of these things while some horsemen were coming down the hill, and just as their forms became visible, I had made up my mind I would stand my ground and let them do their worst, if my pursuers were inclined to fight; and I did not doubt but they were, provided I could be taken at a disadvantage.

Suddenly one of the horses caught sight of the broken volante, and gave a spring to avoid a collision; and if the man who was mounted upon the animal had not been an admirable horseman, he would have been sent flying through the air like a rocket without a tail. This circumstance caused both men to check their animals, and look around to see what the matter was.

"*Diablo*," cried a voice, which I recognized as that of Captain Martenello, "the infernal brute nearly sent me flying over his head. There is something in the road. Can you make out what it is?"

"My eyes are somewhat dim," said the Don. "Perhaps you had better examine the road, and report what the obstruction is."

"Yes; I suppose I must encounter all the danger, although one would imagine that a father looking for a daughter would care for nothing else."

"I should think a lover would fear no danger while in pursuit of a mistress," the Don said. "The rascal who has stolen my child would not have scrupled to encounter a dozen men in her behalf. He is a bold man, although a bad one."

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"Curses on him!" the captain muttered. "I should like to test his bravery. I believe him to be a bragging coward, like most Americans. If I overtake him, he shall never see another day."

While the captain was speaking, the Don had carefully approached the volante and examined it.

"This is the carriage in which they escaped," cried the Don. "They have been overturned, and can't be far from here. Let us ride on, and see if we can't find them."

"And fall into an ambush and furnish targets for that cursed Yankee and his revolver?" cried the rational captain. "No, senor, I don't do anything of that sort. I'm too good a soldier."

"Why, I thought that a moment since you were anxious for a fight. How is it you change so sudden? We must reach the port before daylight, or my child is lost — not only to you, but to me forever."

"I would fight the American or any other man who seeks to deprive me of a mistress," cried the gallant captain, "but I don't like meeting a man in the dark. Besides, the Americans are a bloodthirsty race, and don't care how many men they kill. If you had taken my advice, we should have waited until a dozen or twenty of the servants had been mounted, so they could have started with us."

"I know, I know," the perplexed Don remarked; "but I supposed the dogs would bring them to. I had no idea they would allow themselves to be shot."

The captain uttered a malediction, and spurred his horse forward; as he did so, his sharp eyes caught sight of the white dress which Gracia wore. Jose and myself he did not see.

"I have found her," cried the captain. "Her companion has fled, and left her alone. If he was but here, I would punish him for his treachery."

He threw himself from his horse as he spoke, and advanced towards Gracia, who clung to me in terror, for fear he would prevail and carry her back to her home.

"Jose," I whispered, "secure the captain's horse. I shall want it."

The negro dropped upon his hands and knees, and crawled along the side of the road, entirely unnoticed by the Don and captain, who were too eager to secure the lady to think of any-

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thing else. The captain dropped the bridle of his horse and sprang towards Gracia; but just as he was about to lay a hand upon her arm, the moon, which had been hidden behind some dark clouds, appeared, and revealed to the astonished soldier his rival's form.

He uttered a fierce oath and started back, and as he did so, I saw him put his hand to his breast as though searching for a weapon. I drew Gracia behind me, and kept my eyes fixed steadily upon the man's movements, determined to shoot him down if he showed any hostile intentions; but while the captain was searching for a weapon, the Don made an appeal to his daughter.

"Gracia," he said, "return with me, or I will never forgive you for this act of disobedience. I have the best right to your love, and shall exert my authority to compel your return if you decline. Do not trust to strangers, especially an American. They are a desperate race."

Had he talked like a parent who really loved his child, I have some doubt whether Gracia would not have been moved by his affection, but he commanded her like a tyrant, and she resisted.

"Padre," she said, "I have always been all affection to you, and should have continued to love and obey you; but you sought to force me to marry a man whom I disliked, and never asked the state of my feelings. I have loved the senor Robert since he saved my life, and I always shall love him until death. I must go where he calls me, even to misery; but I trust to happiness. Pardon me, father, but think how much I owe the senor."

"Enough," cried the captain. "I did not come here to hear the whining of a girl who should be placed in a convent until her senses are restored. I was led to suppose she was anxious to become my wife, or I should not be here. Let us finish our work as soon as possible, and return. Advance, Don Ingracia, and claim your child, and woe to the man who opposes you."

I began to think I had miscalculated the fellow, after all, and that he really had some fight in him. I thought I would give him a chance to show his spirit, and therefore submitted a proposition.

"Senor," I said, "we can settle this matter between us. We each claim the lady's hand. Let us fight for her like men, and to the victor she shall belong."

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"I am a gentleman," was the haughty answer, "and cannot debase myself so much as to fight with a man who deals in slaves. Become like me, and I will refer you to a friend."

"So that you could have time to run," broke in Jose, to my utter surprise.

The captain turned and cast a look of fury and scorn upon the slave, who had dared to speak in such a manner.

"You black rascal," the Spaniard said, "I'll have you whipped from one end of the island to the other, if you dare to speak to me."

"Thank you, Senor Captain; but I don't belong to you, and never expect to. You are much more fond of whipping blacks than fighting whites, as half your regiment can testify."

"Silence, Jose," I said.

But I was too late with my rebuke; for the words had so irritated the Spaniard, he turned upon the black, who was standing near, not suspecting an attack, and plunged a long knife into his bosom.

"I am killed," cried Jose, as he sank upon his knees, stretching out his hands towards me, as though praying me to revenge his murder.

Gracia shrieked, and would have fled from the scene, but I restrained her. Her cries aroused the rage of the captain to a frantic pitch, and, thirsting for blood, he waved his knife and sprang towards me with the benevolent intention of serving me in the same manner he had Jose.

"Come no nearer," I cried, cocking my revolver. "Be warned in time."

"Dog of a Yankee," the madman replied, "you, too, shall die."

He was within three paces of me when he spoke, and his knife was gleaming in the moonbeams ready to descend upon my breast, so I had no time to lose. I aimed my pistol and fired. The captain plunged at my feet, face down, and did not move again, so I am inclined to think the bullet took effect; but I did not examine the man, or look for his wound.

I removed my eyes from the corpse just in time to see Don Ingracia staring at me and the body alternately, as though doubting the evidence of his senses, and not knowing what to make of it.

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But suddenly the truth flashed through his brain, and with a groan he rushed towards his horse, shouting as he did so, —

"You shall be shot for this, as sure as my name is Ingracia."

I heard his horse's hoofs dashing up the hill, and then, with a few quieting words to Gracia, went and examined Jose. The captain's knife had struck home, and the poor fellow's life-blood was oozing forth at a rapid rate.

"The saints bless you, senor," Jose said, in a feeble tone. "I should like to have lived and served you faithfully during a long life, but it cannot be. You have treated me like a man since I have been your slave, and I have been happy in consequence. But do not stay here. Fly to the vessel while you have time, for the Don will soon return with a large force, take you prisoner, and treat you rudely."

"But, Jose, I cannot leave you here to die alone. I may be able to yet save your life."

"No hope for me, senor. The knife went too far. It is but a question of time. You have avenged my death, and that is all I could wish. The captain was a rascal, and always was one. I have heard of his doings many times, and I thank the saints the lady Gracia was not his wife. Now go, for time is precious to you and to her."

I felt his hand grow cold, as his breath grew short. He again spoke, but his mind wandered; and in a few minutes the soul of the slave had fled from its earthly abode to the home that is promised all mankind, regardless of color, creed, or profession. I could have shed tears for the man's death, for he had bound himself to me by such ties as rarely bind master and servant. Even Gracia, who had been taught to look upon the death of a negro as a matter of no consequence whatever, could not suppress her tears as she clung to my shoulder and gazed at the body. But it was no time for grief. We had some three miles to travel before we reached the port of Castro de Lego, and it was necessary we should arrive there early, or before the inhabitants of the town were stirring. But how to get there was the question. The volante was a wreck, and the horses were not saddled; but while I was thinking the matter over, Gracia pointed to the captain's horse, and said, —

"We can ride that animal, and you can hold me on."

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I had thought of that plan also, but feared to propose it. I put my arm around her waist, lifted her to the saddle, and sprang up behind her.

Just as the first indications of day were visible in the east, we reached the port, and rode quickly through the silent streets towards the pier, where I expected to find a boat awaiting me. Just as we reached the dock, I saw the black hull of the Coquette sitting upon the water like a duck, while a light, which hung in the main rigging, showed that the people on board were alive to their duties.

I looked around for the boat which I expected, but did not see one; and just as I was about to hail the schooner, some person sprang up from behind a fishing craft that was overturned upon the beach, and rushed towards us.

"Here I have waited for you all night," said Francisco; "and the saints be praised, I have not waited in vain. Senorita, I greet you."

The senorita bowed her acknowledgments.

"Is the boat on shore?" I asked.

"It is behind the pier, senor, and the men are waiting."

"Then let us embark, for we have no time to lose;" and in ten minutes we were on board the schooner, and Gracia was resting in her old state-room.

CHAPTER XVII.

UP WITH THE ANCHOR. — MORE PURSUIT. — THE STEAMER. — AN EXPLANATION, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

"You may call all hands and heave short," I said to the mate. "We will take advantage of this land breeze, and get a good offing."

The men quickly mustered on deck, and manned the windlass, and roused the chain in with hardly an effort.

We hove short, hoisted our fore and aft sails, and then tripped the anchor; and as the head of the vessel began to pay off, I heard a terrible clattering in the streets of the town, and in

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a few seconds the uniforms of a dozen lancers hove in sight; and splendid horsemen they were, too, riding down to the water's edge at full gallop, and fairly splashing the brine into their faces as they drew rein in line, and directed their gaze towards us.

"There is some fun here," muttered Francisco. "I should not wonder if I were compelled to visit America, whether I desired to or not. But the officer has something to say. Let us listen."

"The schooner, ahoy!" cried the lieutenant, who had charge of the party.

"Well, what is it?" I asked, leaning over the rail.

"In the name of the captain general, I command you to surrender the vessel into my hands, while all of the crew will go with me as prisoners to Havana!" yelled the lieutenant, with a flourish of his sword.

"And suppose we don't consent to such an arrangement?" I asked.

"We must take you by force, then," was the unsatisfactory answer.

The head of the schooner had fallen off, and was pointing direct for the narrows. The crew were wondering what we were talking about, but were not enlightened, on account of their want of knowledge in regard to the Spanish language. I saw they looked curious, but far from frightened; I hoped I should not have to put their courage to a test.

"Ease off the fore and main sheets," I said, "and send a hand aloft to loose the topsail."

The schooner began to feel the force of the wind, and gathered headway, which produced for me the honor of another hail.

"Hullo, the schooner!" cried the officer, who had command of the cavalry.

"What is wanting?" I asked.

"You must wait for us. I have orders to take prisoner the master of the vessel. If you don't stop I shall use violence."

The topsail was sheeted home, and the top-gallant sail drawing like a horse. We had just half a mile to go before we passed the mouth of the harbor, and were beyond the reach of the guns of the fort, which I did not fear much, as they had not been used for many years, and most of them were not mounted.

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"Give her the square-sail," I said to the mate. "We have no time to lose, and every stitch of canvas must count. Now is the time to test the smartness of the crew."

The men jumped to obey the order, and ran up the rigging like monkeys.

"By dam!" shouted the soldier, flourishing his sword over his head, and speaking as much English as he could muster, for fear I did not understand Spanish. "I dink dat you run away if you can."

"You dink 'bout right," I answered back.

But the soldiers were upon no ordinary errand, and were determined to distinguish themselves at all hazards. They wheeled and rode back to dry land, and then held a short parley, which resulted in a division of forces. Six of them dismounted and took possession of a fishing boat, while the others spurred their horses along the beach at full speed, with the evident intention of gaining a position where they could fire upon us at short range, the north side of the narrows, provided, of course, they could gain that place before we passed through.

"I don't see how I can land with safety, now," Francisco said, while we were standing near the taffrail, watching the boat and soldiers who were galloping along the shore with the evident intention of cutting us off.

"Would it distress you much if you went on a pleasure trip to the States?" I asked.

Francisco smiled. It was what he most desired, and I was glad to have his company.

"I suppose you could explain matters to the firm," the young man said.

"I will do the best I can for you; so consider yourself a passenger, with nothing but a good time before you."

"Them soger chaps is coming arter us, hand over hand, sir," Mr. Prentice said. "What shall we do with 'em?"

I looked, and found that the boat was within half a cable's length of us, and that the wind was failing fast, so we merely had steerage way.

"We can lick 'em, sir," said the mate, "if you jest say the word. We can do it, I know."

I had no doubt of it, for the Coquette had resisted ten times the

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number, and successfully, of stout Britons. Our guns were all on board and in their places, but I did not like to use them unless driven to it.

"I have heard," I remarked, in a quiet way, "that the Spanish soldiers don't take to hot water."

The mate ran forward and put his head into the galley for a moment, and then rushed aft.

"The doctor's got two coppers full of water, sir, all ready for coffee. 'Tain't hot enough to start brustles, sir, but 'twill clean 'em amazingly nice."

"And I suppose they need it," I remarked.

"No doubt of it, sir. If they don't like it they can go ashore, and be hanged to 'em."

The mate went forward and filled a bucket with hot water, and with a tin pot in his hand, stationed himself near the starboard gangway, to which point the boat was heading.

"Say, dare, you no stop, hey?" cried some one in the boat.

"No, we no stop," I replied, in imitation.

"Then cuss you!" was the exclamation; and the boat blundered alongside.

"Watch, O, watch and heave!" yelled the mate, discharging half a dozen pots of water upon the heads of the soldiers, who thought that they were hurt much more than they really were, for the water was not hot enough to take the skin off, but the Spaniards did not stop to think of that. With frantic yells they shouted to each other to shove the boat off, and one individual, in a state of great excitement, went overboard and yelled as though bitten by a shark, to the intense delight of the fishermen on shore, who had no love for the soldiers, and did have much respect for slavers, which latter class they supposed we were.

A light breeze again came rippling over the water, and filled our sails. The Coquette shot ahead, and left the boat astern, with the soldiers swearing most frightfully, and tearing off their garments to see how much they were injured.

"We did that pretty nice, sir," said the mate, coming aft, and surveying the boat and crew with much complacency.

"But the mounted squad is near the mouth of the harbor, and might injure us with their pistols," I remarked.

"Yes, they might do that," the mate said; and he glanced his keen Cape Cod eyes upon the soldiers, who were galloping their

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horses up the hill which overlooked the narrows, thus giving them a fair chance at us.

"I have heard," I said, "that a blank cartridge would start a Spanish soldier sometimes. I think one of our midship guns could be elevated sufficient to rake those fellows."

"By the Lord Harry, I'll try it," the mate cried. "I loaded 'em all up last night, 'cos I didn't know but we might want 'em for somethin' or uther."

We were moving through the water at the rate of three knots an hour, and the wind was freshening every moment. The cavalry were ranged in line, and I could see that each man had drawn his holster pistol, and intended to aim it at us. They were not more than half a cable's length from us, and therefore we were a very pretty target for them, if they were good marksmen; but we were not destined to test their aim, for suddenly one of our six-pounders spoke, and to my surprise I saw a shot strike the bank close to the soldiers' feet, and throw a cloud of dust high in the air.

"I'll be darned if I didn't forget to draw that 'ere shot," said the mate, with a ludicrous look of astonishment. "S'posing I'd have killed the dark-skinned rascals?"

I did not reply, for my attention was directed towards the cavalry, and if ever an arm of the service strove to get out of the way in a hurry, that squad did, and without regard to discipline, or who was left behind.

But the soldiers in the boat determined to revenge their defeat, and as soon as they landed, applied to the captain of the port, and received permission to open fire upon us from the fort.

Luckily the cavalry arm was not very skilful as artillerists, or the Coquette might have been singed before she was beyond range, for one brass piece carried a shot remarkably well, pitching the first about a cable's length from us, on the starboard beam, and sending the spray many fathoms high. The gun for the second shot was badly aimed, the ball falling directly in our wake, half a cable's length astern.

"This grows interesting," I said to the mate. "If they should blunder enough to hit us, some of our woodwork or spars will suffer. We must get out of range as soon as possible. Haul aft the fore and main sheets, and port your helm."

By altering our course we were enabled to haul upon the wind,

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and head along the land. A few minutes' sailing carried us under the bluffs, and out of sight of the fort, when we once more edged away from the land, and kept on our former course.

We had a merry breakfast. Francisco was not in the least distressed at being carried off, and was as much satisfied with his position as though he was acting with the full consent of the firm with which he was connected. Gracia was charming, of course, and her bright eyes shone with additional splendor, as she thought that within a few weeks she would be my wife; and I must confess that I was even more eager than herself for such an agreeable consummation.

After breakfast we went on deck, and remained there until noon, talking of various matters of interest to ourselves, but not of the slightest importance to the reader. The bold coast of Cuba was in sight, not more than six miles distant, for we were running it down, heading as we were to the northward, and Gracia was admiring the fertile valleys and the green hills, with cottages and thatched huts scattered over both.

"There seems to be some smoke close in shore," Gracia said, pointing to the land.

I took the glass, and saw that what Gracia took for smoke upon the land was smoke from the stack of a large steamer, which had apparently left Havana but a short time before, and was just rounding a point which had concealed her from our observation.

"I'd give that fellow a wide berth," Francisco remarked, "for it is the Spanish war steamer Furious, and who knows what her errand may be?"

I took the hint, and edged away from the land, but saw with some surprise that the steamer was heading direct for us, and that, as we altered our course, so did the man-of-war, which looked significant.

"If he is chasing us, under the impression that we are a slaver, I will give him a chance to overhaul us, and let him examine and find out his mistake," I said to Francisco.

"Don't do that," was my friend's reply. "I never knew a war steamer, belonging to Spain, to chase a slaver, unless the latter was in distress. Depend upon it, our best course is to keep on, and escape if possible. The captain of that steamer wants to speak us for something important. He is a suspicious character, and I should avoid him."

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I saw the men casting uneasy glances at the steamer, but they said nothing which denoted they felt any fear of an encounter. My band was small, but I doubted not that I could depend upon it; and I thought that, if matters did look serious, and the steamer forced us to fight, a shot from our midship gun might do such damage that pursuit would be impossible.

"I should like to see how that feller would stand fire," the mate said, after a brief inspection of the sails forward. "I have heard that the Spaniards ain't much for fighting, but I don't know anything for sartin. Give the men a glass of grog, and I'll warrant they'll stand a broadside and never flinch."

"Give all a glass of grog, and tell them that those who fear a shot can go under hatches when the time arrives. And also inform them that the man who shows least fear shall have a present of a hundred dollars."

The mate went forward with the liquor, and told the men what I said; and the seamen cheered most heartily at the proposition.

The steamer was within two miles of us, and we were not moving through the water faster than three knots an hour. I glanced thoughtfully at the gun amidships, but concluded to let it remain undisturbed until it was necessary to use it as a last resort.

"Well, sir, what are we to do? Fight, or let 'em take us?" asked the mate.

"They will not take us without a fight," I remarked, "even if I have to battle alone."

"You shall have me to back you, sir, as old Daddy Groper said to the whale when he fell overboard, and lighted upon the back of a big one. Count me in if there is a fight."

"Then look to the guns, and have them ready for use. Pass the muskets up from the store-room, and see that they are placed where we can find them if wanted."

The mate sprang forward and spoke to the men, and they came tumbling aft with a will. The extra lashings were cast off from the small guns, and they were loaded with grape and canister. I undertook the care of Long Tom, and saw that plenty of shot were placed in a tub alongside of it, and that the cartridges were handy. Then everything was covered up as before, and no signs of warlike preparations were visible,

The steamer ranged alongside, taking the weather gage, and

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a little fellow, with a sword by his side of terrible length, hailed us in Spanish.

"What schooner is that?" he asked.

I told him.

"Have you slaves on board?" was the next question.

"Not a slave," was my answer.

"Well, heave to, and I will send a boat on board."

A cutter arrived alongside, and the lieutenant, who had charge of the boat, came on deck. He was a tall, bilious-looking man, with dark face and eyes, and a habit of twisting his mouth as though it was partly paralyzed. He jerked his words as though they were served out by a stingy purser, who was fearful he was not making money enough by the operation.

As the officer came aft I bowed, and spoke to the mate.

"Mr. Prentice," I said, "don't let that boat's crew on deck. Keep them in the cutter. We don't want them."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the answer. "Keep in the boat, you black marines, or I'll make you smell brimstone, by the salt turkey of Cape Cod. We is free American citizens, and ain't used to being run over by every beggar that floats on the sea."

It is not at all probable that the Spaniards knew what was said, but they understood the gestures, and did not offer to stir from the boat. The officer may have told them to keep quiet while he was absent, and if he did they obeyed without trouble.

"Sir," said the lieutenant, making a fearful mouth, "I want to know your name."

"And suppose I should not give it," I answered.

The look which the officer gave me was most astonishing.

"Do you know," he said, "that our steamer carries guns?"

"I suppose she does," was the quiet answer.

The lieutenant was astonished for the second time, and round and round went his mouth as though searching for itself.

"Who are you?" he asked at length.

"The master of this vessel," was my answer.

"Have you the daughter of Don Ingracia, of San Felipe, on board?" was the next blunt question.

"There is a lady on board, and she is the daughter of the man you mention."

"I want her, and I want you. Both must go to Havana," the officer said.

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"For what?"

"For abducting the lady, and for killing Captain Martenello of the army, last night."

"I did not abduct the lady, and I did kill the captain; but it was in self-defence, and I should do it again, if necessary for the preservation of my life."

"How? Take care. Your confessions will be used against you. I warn you on that point," the Spaniard said.

"Where?" I asked.

"At Havana."

"But if I should refuse to go, what then?"

The Spaniard struggled hard to keep perfectly cool, but the effort was a failure. His mouth revolved like a grindstone when in motion, and it was a long time before he could speak.

"Diablo!" he shouted, "do you see that steamer?"

"I do."

"Do you know that she carries ten guns?"

"Yes."

"Then you will go with us, and without further words. The boat awaits you and the lady. Both must go."

I smiled at the man's earnestness, and lighted a cigar. I offered my visitor one, but it was declined with a stiff bow.

"Senor," I said, "I am an American, and my crew are all Americans. I am bound to an American port, and have regular clearance papers."

"The captain general has no respect for authority excepting his own. We were despatched with instructions to bring you into port."

"I shall not go," I answered, firmly. "But to show you that the lady is not kept on board, contrary to her inclination, I will introduce you to her, and you can ask her such questions as you please."

The officer looked a little mollified at this, and intimated that he was ready to speak with the lady.

Just as I was about to descend the companion-way, the mate whispered to me, —

"The United States frigate Growler is off our weather bow, and standing towards us. I know the old tub well. If we could get the skipper to stand neutral, we'll whip thunder out of the Spaniard in no time."

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I was glad the frigate was in sight, for I did not know but I could claim some sort of protection at the hands of the captain, who had consented to receive my gold on board, and who would require no other certificate to prove that I was an American.

Gracia arose when the officer entered the cabin, and would have retired to her state-room, had I not requested her to remain.

"This gentleman has a few questions to ask you," I said, "and I pray you to answer them as you please."

"Did you leave your father's house without compulsion?" the officer asked, after a moment's hesitation.

"I certainly did," was the answer.

"I understand from your father that you were forced from home," the officer remarked.

"My father is mistaken. I left with my intended husband voluntarily."

"I am sorry that my duty is such a disagreeable one, but we have the express orders of the captain general to return with you to Havana. Matters may be settled there satisfactorily."

Gracia looked the alarm she felt, and cast an appealing glance towards me.

"Fear nothing," I said. "The gentleman will not resort to force to carry out his instructions, and if he does he will be met by force."

The lieutenant flushed, and smiled.

"You would not dare oppose the wishes of the captain of the steamer," he remarked.

"Let him attempt to carry out his instructions, and he shall see what I dare do," I replied.

"In the name of the saints, do nothing rash!" exclaimed Gracia. "Do not expose yourself to danger, Robert, on my account. Let me return, if by my return I can prevent bloodshed."

"But your intended must also go with us," the officer said.

I touched a bell, and the steward entered the cabin.

"Send Mr. Prentice to me," I said.

The mate promptly made his appearance.

"Mr. Prentice," I said, "run up the American flag at the mainmast, and see all clear for action. We must fight, or surrender a lady who trusts in our courage and honesty."

"And she shan't trust in vain, by the sands of Cape Cod. We

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can fight till the old Growler comes up, anyhow, and she'll settle matters."

The officer understood enough English to know what I said. He made no remark, but bowing to the lady, left the cabin.

"Francisco," I said, hurriedly, "conduct Gracia to the run, and remain with her until this matter is settled. Remember she must not be exposed to danger."

When the lieutenant gained the deck, he turned to look at his steamer. She was half a mile to windward, for the Coquette had been edging away since the officer was on board, and yet those on the steamer had not appeared to notice it. I had hinted to the mate that such a course was desirable, to get out of range of the small guns which she carried, and which could be brought to bear upon us.

"Once more I ask you to go with me," said the lieutenant. "It will be best for you."

I shook my head, and pointed to the guns which were all run out and ready for service. The officer's mouth revolved several times rapidly, and then he stepped to the gangway.

"Tumble up here, lads," he said, "and be in a hurry about it."

The Spaniards started to their feet, but the mate, backed by the crew of the Coquette, rallied at a signal, with boarding-pikes in their hands and revolvers in their belts.

"The man who leaves the boat dies!" I shouted. "No one shall set foot upon this deck without my consent. If you want to fight, you will find us ready. Shoot down the first man who moves;" and as I spoke, my men grasped their pikes as though anxious for the fray, while the lieutenant drew his sword, but made no attempt to use it, and if he had, a pistol ball would have finished him with but little trouble.

"Call off your men," the Spaniard said, at length, finding that it was useless, with his present force, to contend with me. "Call off your men. I will leave, and report to the captain."

He passed over the side, his mouth revolving, and his black eyes flashing. I bowed, but he barely returned it. He leaped into the cutter, and shoved off.

"We shall sink you at the first broadside," he said, as the cutter passed under the counter.

"But I shall not give you a chance to do that," I answered; and the Spanish sailors dipped their oars into the water, and pulled towards the steamer.

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I instantly altered the course of the schooner, and headed so that we could speak the frigate, which was about five miles distant, and standing towards us.

The steamer hoisted the cutter, after a few moments' deliberation between captain and lieutenant, and then a rush of black smoke through the smoke-stack told us that the Spaniard was after us.

"I wonder if the old dragon will fire at us?" the mate said; but before I had time to answer the question, a puff of smoke ascended from the bow of the steamer, and a dull report showed that the entertainment had commenced in earnest.

The shot whistled past us, and struck the water about ten fathoms ahead of us, throwing up the spray like a fountain.

"That means hold on till I come up," said the mate. "But we are somewhat pressed for time, and I think that he will excuse us."

"The lady, sir, wants to speak to you," said the second mate, pointing to the after hatchway.

I stepped to the cabin, and looked down.

"O, Robert," cried Gracia, who was hiding in the run to escape as much danger as possible, "do come down here, and stay with me. Let the men do the fighting. Just oblige me this once."

"It is impossible, Gracia. I must remain on deck, and look after the vessel. If we have your prayers we shall be safe."

"Just like my wife, sir," said the mate, brushing his eyes. "Arter we were married she wanted me to stay on shore, 'cos she knowed there was danger on the water. But, Lord, I jist told her it didn't matter much where a man was, if he only had his heart right, and did the right thing by every one. Ah, there goes that bloody Spaniard agin."

The mate was right. The shot struck just under our taffrail, and sent a shower of spray over the quarter-deck.

"Better let 'em have some, sir," the mate said. "We can't stand this long, you know. It is insulting, and nothing else."

"We will receive one more shot and answer it," I said; and the mate sprang towards the Long Tom, to clear it away in season for the returning compliment.

Hardly had Prentice cast off the breaching of the midship gun, when a third shot from the steamer's bow chaser was fired; and the ball was well aimed, for it passed through one cloth of our

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mainsail, plunged through the foresail, and dropped into the water fifty fathoms ahead.

"Let her rip, sir?" asked the mate, tearing off his hat and vest in his excitement, and shaking his fist at the steamer.

"If we stand it we are forever disgraced," the crew shouted.

"We will give them as good as they send," I replied, stepping forward. "Slew the muzzle of the gun to port; steady! that will do. Now, down with your helm," I said, addressing the man at the wheel; and as the wheel went down, the schooner shot into the wind, and shook her sails.

I glanced along the heavy piece, and elevated it slightly by the turn of a screw, and saw that I could pitch a shot into the hull of the steamer without fail.

"Hard up with your helm," I shouted; and as I spoke the schooner shook from truck to keelson with the recoil of the gun.

The men watched the course of the shot with eager interest. It struck the steamer on the bow port, dismounted the gun which had been supplying us with ten pound shot for some time past, tore along the deck, knocking down half a dozen men, badly wounding them, and at last travelled through the poop, and then went through the stern, and dropped into the sea.

"Bully for us!" shouted the men. "The Spaniard can't stand that long. Give him another one before he has time to think of it."

But the noise of our guns had attracted the attention of the Growler frigate. The captain of the United States ship was well known upon the Havana station at the time. He had been in service when he began to cut his teeth, had fought all through the war of 1812 as a midshipman, and ascended slowly, step by step, to have command of a large frigate.

Captain Bluff was looking at the schooner and steamer at the time we luffed and gave the Spaniard a taste of our quality, while the firing was done so rapidly that it commanded the admiration of the veteran.

"By thunder!" he shouted to the officers of the Growler, who were all on the quarter-deck, "that little hop-o'-my-thumb is going to get the best of the fight."

"The schooner has the American flag up at the main, sir,' said the signal midshipman, touching his cap.

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"The devil she has! I'm afraid I shall have to punish him by taking him in."

The steamer had fired up for the purpose of increasing her speed, so that she could drop alongside of us before the Growler could come within hailing distance and interfere. The Spaniard did not seem disposed to fire another shot, and I can't say I was sorry at the determination; for one of them might have hit me, and I was not desirous of such an honor.

All that we could do was to move quietly along and join the American frigate as soon as possible, hoping that her commander would interfere and take us under his protection; but the sight of the United States ship spurred the Spaniard to renewed exertions, and a desire to show the Yankees that a little schooner could not frighten the best steamer Spain could boast of; and when I was about to call Gracia from her place of concealment, I was surprised to hear a gun, and a shot whistled over our heads, in a direct line with the spars.

"The Spaniard is at it again," said the mate. "Darnation take him, he hasn't got a bellyful yet."

Bang went another gun from the steamer, and the shot struck alongside, and threw half a cask of water upon deck.

"Darn all of my wife's relations if I stand it," muttered the mate. "Let's give him one, just for the honor of Cape Cod."

I nodded, and the Long Tom was soon in position.

"Let me have a slap at him this time," Mr. Prentice said, in a beseeching tone.

"All right. Fire as I luff up," I said.

The schooner's head was poked into the wind, and the mate glanced along the piece and fired. The ball struck the steamer's foremast, sent a shower of splinters about the deck, and then tore away three of the shrouds of the main rigging on the starboard side.

"I've just got his distance," said the mate. "Let me crack at him once more, and I'll do better."

But further proceedings were suspended by the action of the Growler; for that ship suddenly hauled up foresail and mainsail, as though going into action, and pitched a shot just ahead of our forefoot, and served the Spaniard the same way.

"That means, Heave to until I have investigated matters," I said; and as the Growler could have sunk the Spaniard and the

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schooner also with half a broadside, I concluded to comply with the request, and the steamer did the same.

The frigate ran in between us, and backed her main-topsail; and then Captain Bluff, his face glowing like the setting sun, put his speaking trumpet to his mouth.

"What in the devil is the meaning of all this?" Captain Bluff asked, hailing the Coquette first, on account of the flag which she carried.

Before I could reply, the Spanish captain, who began to think that I should have too good a story all to myself, yelled out in Spanish, —

"He's a pirate, and has on board the daughter of one of the richest men of Cuba."

"Well, you wouldn't have him take the daughter of the poorest man — would you?" was thundered back, and a hoarse laugh went with the words.

"Well, I s'pose I'll have to look into this matter, Harvey," the captain said to his first lieutenant.

"It is decidedly your duty to find out what is wrong, sir; and the best way to accomplish the purpose is to send the first cutter on board the schooner, and take charge of her for the present, and request the master of her to pay us a visit with his papers. The captain of the Spaniard can also be invited to come on board."

"That's a good idea, Harvey, and I'll act on it, and play the part of judge to perfection. I don't know but little about law, but I'm some on justice."

On board I went, with Gracia to keep me company.

The captain's cabin on board of the Growler was rather a comfortable sort of a place, being a large, square room, with easy chairs, which were lashed to the deck to prevent them from making short trips when the frigate rolled heavily; a lounge covered with morocco, and looking as though it had been used during the voyage for afternoon naps; several engravings of naval battles, and in all of them the American flag was prominent as the successful one; one or two portraits of distinguished opera dancers in very slight clothing, and very large legs and terribly small waists; a table covered with papers and books; and happening to cast my eyes upon the title of one of the latter, I saw that it read "History of Prize Fighting," and I knew that the

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captain was an admirer of the ring from his build, while men of his stamp generally like fair play in business as well as in fighting. Into this apartment did the captain conduct and welcome us.

"Here we are," he said, "as snug as at the best hotel in New York, and no one to disturb us. Here we will hold a council of war, and will decide what is to be done. Let the lady be seated, and make herself at home. I wish that my old woman was here just to keep her company for a while; though, as a general thing, I don't think much of having women on shipboard."

"Suppose we proceed to business, senor," the Spanish captain, whose name was Morello, said, with a sigh of impatience.

The captain stepped to the door, and said, —

"Sentry, pass the word for the steward."

"Pass the word for the captain's steward," was yelled fore and aft, and in a moment that individual entered the cabin.

"Brandy and water, a bottle of champagne and cigars, and be lively about it," were the orders which Captain Bluff bestowed; and as the liquors were kept as convenient as anything in the ship, they were on the table in short order.

"Now go;" and in obedience to the order, the steward vanished.

"Here's some good wine, Mr. Robert. I hope the lady will honor me by taking a glass. But we will stick to something substantial, and take brandy. Now," cried Bluff, "I feel like business. Let us heave ahead, and see how the land lays, and perhaps we can settle this matter before the bottles become marines. Who speaks first? I'll listen and throw in a word or two."

The Spaniard waved his hand for me to proceed; but I wanted the closing argument, as the landsharks say, and declined.

"About ten o'clock this morning," said the Spanish captain, "I received an order to fire up, and then come to the palace, and have an interview with the captain general. I gave directions to be all ready to get under way, and went to learn the commands of his excellency. At the palace I saw this lady's father, Don Ingracia, who had rode all the way from San Filipe to give information of the abduction of his daughter, and of the murder of Captain Martenello by an American. The Don stated that he had learned that the senor would embark on board of a slaver,

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and either start for Africa or the United States, and offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for the return of his daughter, and the apprehension of the American. I received the orders of the captain general to proceed in search of the slaver, and to bring her and crew to Havana at all hazards. I got under way without delay, and here I am."

Gracia put her arms around my own, and pressed her face close to mine, as she exclaimed, —

"O, senor, he did not kill the captain until he was compelled to, or he killed himself. I saw the whole of the transaction. I saw Captain Martenello plunge a knife into the heart of a faithful slave, and then turn the weapon upon my intended husband. He is innocent of crime."

"Blow me, if this isn't the best thing I ever heard of. My eyes begin to pump salt water, and I can't stand much more, or I shall go by the board," muttered the captain.

"It is a trick concocted between them," cried the Spaniard. "If he is innocent, as she says that he is, let them return to Havana and prove it. We have justice in our courts, and the American can have a fair trial."

"There's some sense in that," Captain Bluff muttered.

"Then let the schooner, and senor and lady, return with me to Havana. Only on such conditions can I talk. Go they must," cried the Spaniard.

"That word must not be used on board of the Growler," Captain Bluff said, with more dignity than he had yet displayed. "I take it that I have the power to enforce obedience to my wishes, and as long as I command a frigate I shall act as I think best for the interests of my country."

"Then relieve me of the bad predicament in which I am placed," said the Spanish captain, who saw the weak side of Captain Bluff, and took his measures accordingly. "You are stronger than I am, and can do as you please. Yet you know that if I return to port without the schooner I shall be degraded and lose my command. Think how that would affect you if placed in my position."

"That's true," grunted Captain Bluff.

"The schooner, you will recollect, has Spanish papers, and therefore United States ships have no right to interfere with what does not concern them."

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"That's also true," Captain Bluff said; "but recollect that an American has chartered her, and as an American he is entitled to protection just as much as though the gridiron was hoisted at the peak, and the schooner was authorized to bear it."

"I know that such is the practice; but when an American has committed an act of piracy, he places himself beyond the pale of protection," the Spaniard insinuated.

"But you have first to prove it. We don't convict men in our country without evidence."

"And in Cuba the same. Now, as a gentleman, I am only anxious to do my duty, and make a good report of my trip. No harm would happen to the lady and her lover if they returned with me. There would be an examination — a slight one — and a discharge."

"That's fair and handsome, I must say," Captain Bluff replied, after a moment's thought.

"If my father would but pardon us, I should like to return," Gracia said.

"Then what is to prevent you from doing so?" Captain Bluff asked.

"The fact that I should be sacrificed without mercy," I replied.

"O, how the senor misjudges us!" cried the Spaniard, with a sardonic grin. "We have no desire to injure him because he eloped with a beautiful lady. That is human nature. All that it is necessary for him to prove is, that she went with him willingly."

"I see nothing unfair in that," mused the captain.

"On condition that the frigate returns to Havana, I will go," I remarked, seeing that the Spaniard had completely blinded the captain, and made the issue one of professional honor. "I ask that she shall remain in the harbor until my case is settled, and that every effort shall be made to obtain a speedy settlement of my difficulties."

"Of course, that is all right and fair. They shan't gouge you a darned bit, if I can help it," Captain Bluff growled.

The Spaniard did not look good-natured at this information.

"I also ask that both of you will pledge your words that I shall remain at liberty, and that no attempt shall be made to imprison me during the progress of examination."

"O, of course we concede that," the Spaniard remarked, with a bland smile, which I put no faith in.

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"I pledge my word for your safety," Captain Bluff cried.

"And I also demand that I shall return to Havana in my own vessel, and that the lady accompany me."

"O, we can't listen to any such proposition as that," the Spaniard said.

"O, pray don't separate us," Gracia cried, with tears in her eyes.

"In my opinion they won't do much harm if they are left together," the American captain remarked, with a chuckle. "Let them return on board of the schooner, and enjoy as much happiness as they can."

"But they may escape," urged the Spaniard.

"No danger of it. He will pledge his word that he will not. I know he will stick to his word."

The Spaniard shook his head.

"It would be better for them if they took up their quarters on board of the steamer. We can reach Havana during the night, and perhaps they will be discharged in the morning."

I vowed I would not do that unless I was sent on board by force; but I promised that, if left alone, I would do what I could to accommodate all parties.

After much talk and many arguments on the part of the Spaniard, Captain Bluff settled that he would leave Lieutenant Nowell on board the schooner, together with half a dozen men; so that, virtually, I was to be a prisoner.

"Now, Mr. Robert, if you wish to return to your own craft, I'll have one of the cutters manned for you," Captain Bluff said, after conferring apart with the Spanish captain a few minutes.

I bowed my thanks, and the captain gave the order to Mr. Harvey, the lieutenant, and the latter to a midshipman, and the latter to a boatswain's mate; and the latter put his silver call to his lips, and whistled long and shrill, and then shouted, —

"Away, you first cutter men! Away, boys, away!"

"I am sorry that matters have not terminated satisfactorily to you and the lady," whispered the first lieutenant, while I was waiting for the manning of the cutter. "If I had my say, the Spaniard would go home with a flea in his ear."

I thanked him, and we shook hands most heartily, and even a friendly smile mantled the face of Gracia.

"The boat is ready, sir," said the midshipman who brought me on board.

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"We shall meet again at Havana, I trust," said the lieutenant, "and I hope to see you spliced on the quarter-deck of the Growler. We have a chaplain who can do the business up quick and strong. He says that he can tie a knot we can't untie with our teeth, and I think that he is right. Well, good by, and take care of yourselves."

We entered the boat and pulled for the Coquette, which was not more than a quarter of a mile distant, hove to, waiting for the result of the negotiations. As we neared the schooner, Mr. Prentice shouted, —

"What's the result?"

"Bad enough," I answered.

"Are we to fight the Spaniard?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Why, we have nothing to do but to return to Havana."

"Is that the decision of the skipper of the Growler?" Mr. Prentice asked.

I said that it was.

"Then he's a bigger blasted fool than I thought he was," was the exclamation; which pleased the midshipman so much that after vainly endeavoring to keep his countenance, he was forced to laugh as loud as he dared to without being rebuked by his officer, who assisted Gracia to the deck, and then read a letter of instructions which the middy handed him.

"I am glad of one thing," said Mr. Nowell. "I find that I am to remain on board and proceed with you to Havana. Do not look upon me as in command, for I am not. I am a passenger, but as such I hope to render you some service before many days."

We filled away and stood after the frigate, while the steamer hovered near us, as though fearful we should attempt to escape.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

WE RETURN TO HAVANA. — THE ARREST. — COMFORTABLE QUARTERS. — IMPORTANT QUESTIONS. — HOW IT ENDED, ETC., ETC.

About six bells the next morning I went on deck, where I found Nowell. It was a fine morning. We were off the harbor of Havana, with Moro Castle just in sight, and the high lands of Cuba, carpeted with green, which caught the rising sun, and covered as they were with the night's dew, sparkled as though some genii had scattered gems upon the sward for the purpose of tempting mankind to regret quitting such a paradise. A light breeze was blowing, just enough to ripple the water and fill our sails.

Some three miles astern of us was the Growler, coming up with everything spread to catch the morning breeze, and in shore of us was the steamer, creeping along slowly, not evidently anxious to reach the port first.

I thought that I would be prepared for the worst, for I knew that if arrested I should be searched, and then farewell to ever again seeing the diamonds which I had around my waist. They would prove such a prize, that but few Spaniards could resist the temptation of appropriating them, and this I wanted to defeat. I hardly knew whom to trust with them. If I could have been certain that Mr. Prentice was not to be molested, I should have confided the stones to his care, with a full assurance that they would have been forthcoming when I asked for them. But after a slight deliberation I concluded to intrust the casket, and what it contained when found on board of the Virgin, to Mr. Nowell, the third lieutenant, well knowing that the Spaniards would not dare to molest him as long as he wore the uniform of the United States navy.

I hastily covered the casket with sail-cloth, secured it with sealing-wax, and then called Nowell into the cabin.

"I am about," I said, in the presence of the mate, "to confide to you a valuable package, if you will take charge of it until I get

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through with my troubles. It is something I would not ask of every one, for there is in the package much to tempt any man."

"It might contain rubies and diamonds for all that I should care," the lieutenant said. "When you want it, just say the word, and it shall be forthcoming."

He put the casket in his bosom, and then we went on deck to attend to anchoring the schooner, and to find a good berth, which was not difficult to do, as shipping was rather scarce.

As we glided along under easy sail, I observed that the captain of the port's barge, filled with soldiers, left the shore, and pulled leisurely towards the steamer, which was anchored in that portion of the harbor where men-of-war congregate.

Francisco, who had refused to quit his state-room after he found we were ordered to Havana, such was his distress, at this moment came on deck and caught sight of the barge.

"*Diablo!*" he said, "it is intended for us, I'll bet a real. If they take me I can't assist you. What shall I do? I want to communicate with our house as soon as possible."

"Have you any objections to serving Uncle Sam for a short time?" Mr. Nowell asked.

"Not the slightest, if it will benefit me," was the answer.

"Then don this coat, and button it around you. The last boat from the frigate brought me a spare one, and a cap, in case we should have a shower during the night. There, that improves you wonderfully, and if you don't talk they will never know but you eat Uncle Sam's bread and drink his rum; and let me tell you that many a worse looking fellow does. You are rather dark, but keep the cap jammed over your eyes, and it will pass for tan."

By the time that Francisco was transformed into an American officer, the boat had stopped for a moment alongside of the steamer, received some directions, and then pulled direct for the schooner. A few vigorous strokes of the oars and the barge was alongside, and the captain of the port, followed by a dozen soldiers, leaped on deck.

"Who is the master of this vessel?" he asked, looking as fierce as a bandit.

I recollected that I had dined, in company with the official, at Don Riejo's house only a few days before, but I hardly thought that he would recollect me.

"I command the schooner," I said, stepping forward.

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The captain looked fierce for a moment, then surprised, and then grieved.

"Caramba!" he muttered; "who in the devil's name expected to see you here?"

"I am here because I was sent for by yonder steamer," I replied.

"Yes; but, *diablo!* I didn't think that it was you. Why couldn't you have sent me word, and then all this trouble would not have occurred? Thunder! I have not forgotten how you served those English dogs, who are continually attempting to break up the slave trade. There must be some misunderstanding."

"You would not have thought so, if you could have seen the Furious firing at us yesterday afternoon," I replied.

"For which service you retaliated most effectually," cried the captain of the port. "But Captain Morrello was always a fool, and will remain one until death. He might have avoided all danger by not seeing you. That is the way that I should have done."

I could hardly avoid laughing in his face at his method of avoiding duty.

"But what is to be done with me?" I asked, more concerned on my own account than I was to listen to apologies.

"Ah, that is the worst part of my duty. Captain Morrello dropped anchor half an hour since, and immediately proceeded to make his report to the captain general. He represented you as a monster pirate, and everything that is bad, and told of the men you had wounded. The captain general is furious. He ordered me to arrest you for the murder of Captain Martenello, — as big a rascal as ever went unhanged, and I am glad that he is dead, — and for abducting Donna Gracia; both complaints of Don Ingracia, who is in town, and swears that he has been most frightfully imposed upon. I have the warrant in my pocket, and what am I to do?"

"You must do your duty, I suppose," I said.

"I am sorry to say that unless I do, my office is not worth a beggar's curse. Things can be explained, I hope, in a few days, but I am somewhat doubtful. At any rate, I am your friend, and will do what I can for you."

"And the lady," I asked; "have you any order respecting her?"

"She must go with me on shore. I am sorry that I cannot allow you to be together; but the fact is, you must take apart-

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ments at Moro Castle; the lady joins her father, who is stopping at his city residence."

This was sad news, but I endeavored to keep my spirits up, and not show how bad I really felt.

"Well, what is to be done?" asked the lieutenant, stepping forward.

I explained to him.

"I'll be cussed if I don't protest against it. Let the Growler arrive, and see what the old man says."

"I am sorry to say that I can't wait, for I was expressly instructed to hurry my movements, so that my prisoner should be at the Castle before the frigate dropped anchor."

"Well, this is a pretty state of society," muttered Nowell. "If I had known that we were to be treated in such a manner, I would have kept out of the harbor until the frigate arrived. But I'll board her, and let the old man know what has happened, just as soon as she drops anchor."

"Have you any authority to act relative to the schooner and crew?" I asked of the captain of the port.

"Not at all. The schooner is free, and so are the crew."

"In one moment I will be ready," I said.

I entered the cabin, and found Gracia in tears. She had overheard our conference, and the thought of being separated from me was more than she could endure without weeping.

"Gracia," I said, "we must part, but I trust that it will be only for a few days. Will you remain true to me until I am released from prison, or until my fate is decided?"

She threw herself into my arms, and clasped me around the neck as though determined never to quit her hold.

"Ay, for years, for I solemnly swear I will never marry unless you ask my hand. I call the saints to witness my oath, and how sincere it is. If you need that to console you during your imprisonment, you have it, and my prayers shall go with you. And now one kiss until we meet again."

Our lips met, and then with a sigh Gracia lay motionless in my arms. Her feelings had overpowered her, and she had fainted. I laid her gently upon a lounge, bathed her head with water, and lingered near her until her senses returned; and then calling Francisco, left her in his charge until the captain of the port should return to the schooner, and remove her to the shore.

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"My friend," I said, "when she leaves for the shore, find out where she goes, and keep track of all her movements, so that I can communicate with her if it be possible. You will do this for me, I know."

"I swear it," he said, earnestly.

"You will also give to your firm an exact account of what has transpired, and ask them to adopt such a course as they may think fit for my liberation."

"In less than an hour I will see the head of the house."

"I am just half an hour behind time, but if the captain general don't like it, he may do the next thing," growled the captain of the port, as he seated himself by my side, and the barge was shoved off.

"I'll take darned good care of the schooner, and everything on board," shouted Mr. Prentice. "We'll have you back in a few days, or the old Growler will do some talking, I reckon."

The long strokes of the boatmen soon carried us beyond hearing, and almost before I had awakened from the reverie into which I had fallen, the barge was at the Castle stairs. Here we met with another guard of soldiers, all drawn up as though expecting to strike terror to the heart of their prisoner.

"What are these soldiers for?" I asked of my companion.

"O," he answered, with a blush, "we thought that we might have some trouble with you after landing, and so I supposed that it was best to be ready. I did not know who I had to arrest. But I will get rid of them at once."

The captain was as good as his word, for the sulky-looking Spanish soldiers filed off and entered the fort, and we followed after them.

"I am going to be quite liberal towards you," the captain said. "I am going to have you confined in a nice chamber inside the fort, and everything that you need shall be supplied; so don't be fearful of asking for what you require. Here we are, close upon the sentinel."

"Who comes?" cried the soldier, throwing his musket into the hollow of his arm, as though he might be called upon to use it.

"*Amigos!*" yelled the captain.

"Advance, friends, and give the pass," was the response.

"Havana," the captain said; and as that was correct, we passed

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on through the ponderous iron gates, which required a dozen men to turn them upon their hinges.

We entered an office where I was introduced to the officer of the guard, who very kindly had me stripped and searched, and what money I had was taken from me, even my watch. The captain stood by during the operation, and when it was concluded, took his leave, declaring that he would see me in the course of the day, and let me know what my friends were doing in my behalf.

The officer in whose charge I was left conducted me along a corridor until we reached the end, when he unlocked a door, and entered an apartment that was large and well lighted; but the light, alas! came through heavily-grated windows, and the latter were some eight feet from the floor, so that prisoners could not look out unless by a powerful muscular effort they were enabled to swing their bodies upon a level with the windows, and hold on by their hands while they gazed.

In one corner of the room was a bedstead of small size, but secured to the floor by bolts, so that it could not be moved and used as a standing-place by any one desirous of looking beyond the walls of the prison. A wash-bowl and pitcher and two chairs completed the furniture of the room.

"This is the best apartment for prisoners in the fort," my conductor said. "If you could see some that are occupied, you would call this a parlor."

I had no doubt of that.

"Of course you drink wine and smoke."

I said, "Of course."

He closed the door, and was gone. For a while I paced up and down the apartment, as miserable a man as it would have been possible to find in all Cuba, and I was about to throw myself upon the bed, and seek forgetfulness in sleep, when I heard a key inserted in the lock, and the door was opened.

In solemn silence in walked two huge negroes, blacker than the thickest coal tar that I ever saw, and each of them bore trays loaded with refreshments, such as wine, and fruit, and delicate cake, and a box of choice cigars.

The officer who had shown me to the apartment accompanied the colored men, and saw that the refreshments were placed upon the table, and arranged in the most tempting manner. Then the

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negroes, without speaking a word, took their leave, and left the officer and myself alone.

"You see," my companion said, "here is wine that we rarely give to prisoners, unless they hold a high rank. But you have killed Englishmen, and I can refuse you nothing on that account. The wine belonged to the late Count Gugdor, who was a prisoner in this room for two months, and contented he was until asked to confess his crimes; and as he wouldn't tell all that he knew, we stretched him one day upon a rack, and then let cold water drop slowly upon his face. In two hours he was conquered, and begged for mercy. He told what was wanted; so, of course, it was not necessary to rack him again. But the count never smiled after his first taste of punishment. He refused to drink his wine, imported, expressly for his house, from France; and when he died I took charge of his effects, and concealed the wine for my own private use."

My companion strode from the apartment, and locked the door after him. Left to myself, I thought that I could do no better than to drink the health of Gracia in the wine which the unfortunate count had left in the fort. I opened one of the bottles and drank to Gracia, and tasted of the fruit, and then threw myself upon my bed and fell asleep, and did not awaken until about two o'clock in the afternoon, when a hand was laid upon my shoulder; starting up, I found the officer, whose name I may as well state was Armoranda, standing by my side.

"I have brought you a change of clothing, which the captain of the port sent from the schooner. Sit up and dress, for you must go with me."

"Where to?" I asked.

"Before the captain general, who will interrogate you in relation to the abduction of a lady, the killing of Captain Martenello, the scalding of soldiers, the firing upon them after your vessel was under way, and the wounding of seven or eight seamen on board of the Furious. Grave charges these. I have racked dozens of men for the mere suspicion of less offences, and without proof."

"Where is the examination to take place?" I asked.

"At the palace."

"Will it be a lengthy one?"

"That will depend upon circumstances. But ask no more

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questions at present. Dress yourself, and look as well as possible; for do you know that dress and looks have great weight sometimes?"

I dressed myself carefully, and then returned to the office of the fort, where I found two soldiers in waiting; and, without exchanging a word, all four of us entered a close carriage, drawn by mules, and left the fort for the city.

"This is the carriage," the officer whispered, "that the count rode in for the last time. The ride was a short one, but he seemed pleased with it. His right leg was crushed, and rested upon the very seat you occupy. But he was a bold fellow, and could bear pain better than any man that I ever saw. You remember the Count Maquil?" he said, addressing one of the soldiers.

"Yes, senor, very well. He gave me an ounce the last time we gave him a ride."

I said nothing, but attempted to look from the window of the carriage, which was frustrated by the soldiers.

"Prisoners are not allowed any such liberties," they said. "You must remain quiet until such time as we shall see fit."

I leaned back and waited for the arrival of the carriage at the palace, and not another word was spoken until the vehicle entered the court-yard, and the heavy gates closed behind us. The door of the carriage was opened, and the soldiers leaped out, and motioned for me to follow them. I did so, and in silence we ascended a flight of steps, and met half a dozen soldiers who were on guard at the entrance.

"In which room is his excellency?" asked Armoranda.

"In the reception-room, and waiting," was the answer.

The soldiers glared at me as we passed along, and their look did not bode me any good; but I did not appear to notice it, and passed along until we met a soldier who was stationed at a door, indicating the room where Concha was waiting our arrival.

The next instant I found myself in the presence of the captain general, the renowned Concha, who looked far from amiable as he sat at one end of the apartment, with half a dozen of his council near him, all ready to write down what was said, and deliberate upon my case.

Concha was at that time about forty years of age, and what the ladies would call a fine-looking man. He was tall, thin, and

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straight as an arrow, and with an eye like a hawk. His face was destitute of beard, with the exception of a mustache, which was long and thick, and entirely concealed his mouth. He was dressed in plain clothes, and wore no mark of distinction excepting an order upon his left breast, secured to his coat by a red button. His brow was high, but narrow, and upon it was a frown which I saw was not intended to do me much good.

"Is this the man?" the captain general asked of Armoranda.

"Yes, your excellency, this is the man," was the answer.

Concha fixed his dark eyes upon me as though to read my inmost thoughts, and crush me with his glance; but I bore all without flinching in the least, and at length his eyes fell.

"Do you speak Spanish?" he asked in good English.

"I do."

"Then your examination shall be conducted in that language. Do you know with what you are charged?"

"I do not, and am desirous of being informed."

"You will learn full fast enough; do not fear;" and Concha smiled as though he should consider it a great triumph to put me out of existence without much delay. "First, you have abducted an heiress from the island. That is punishable by death."

I did not flinch, nor move a muscle.

"Second, you have killed an officer of the Spanish army, and that, too, is punishable by death."

I made no response.

"Third, you have dared to fire upon my troops, and upon a Spanish frigate, and that, too, is punishable by death."

"Then it seems that if I had three lives I should only have enough to satisfy the law, and as I only have one, I don't know how you will manage it," I remarked.

Concha liked a little dash of impudence sometimes, and therefore his features relaxed, and something like a smile passed over them; but it was only for a moment, and then all were hard, stern, and cold again. After a pause he asked, —

"You are an American — are you not?"

"I have the honor to be."

"And have been engaged in the slave trade?"

"Yes, I do not deny it. It is a profitable business, but one which did not please me, and I left it."

"Where did you first see the lady you abducted?"

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"I did not abduct any lady. She left her father's house voluntarily."

"Where did you see her first? Answer truly."

"I saved her life. She was on board of a vessel, and deserted. The vessel was on fire, and in half an hour's time it would have been too late to assist her. I returned her safe to her father's house, and then told her that I loved her. There was no harm in that, I suppose."

Concha whispered with one of his council, and I saw that he smiled; and that, I thought, was not a bad omen.

"Are there not ladies enough in America, that you should come here for a wife?" Concha asked.

"None so fair as the lady Gracia," I answered.

Another smile passed over Concha's face; his council, taking a hint from their superior, also suffered their faces to relax from their grimness.

"You have some sharpness, if you are an American," Concha remarked, after a moment's pause.

"It is necessary if one lives in Havana," I remarked.

The captain general consulted with his advisers, and they delivered a whispered command to one of the soldiers. The latter left the apartment, and a solemn silence pervaded the meeting until the soldier returned, and escorted Don Ingracia, the father of Gracia, and the man who was indebted to me for life.

"Have you ever seen the prisoner before?" Concha asked, addressing the Don.

"Yes, your excellency. He is the one who carried off my daughter by force, and also killed Martenello, who was to have married her."

"Can you substantiate the charges? Will your daughter say as much as that?"

"She will, your excellency."

"Then his death is certain, and all the forces of the United States shall not save him," Concha said, with a terrible frown.

"Will you listen to an explanation?"

"Not to day. Your time has not yet arrived to speak. When it does I will let you know."

"Don Ingracia," I said, "for the part you have taken in this matter I pardon you for your daughter's sake. I acknowledge that I am to be blamed, but not murdered, for eloping with the

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lady. You know that her love was mine, and yet you have done all in your power to crush her affections. If it is any satisfaction to you, I hope you will enjoy it."

The Don turned to the window, and was much affected. He could not answer me.

At this instant an officer entered the apartment as though upon some errand of importance.

"Well, sir, what is wanted?" demanded Concha, almost fiercely.

"The American consul and the captain of the United States frigate ask for audience, senor."

"What do they wish?"

"They say an American citizen has been imprisoned unjustly, and after a fair agreement with the captain of the steamer Furious that such should not be the case. Until this matter is settled, the frigate refuses to salute the forts, or the flag of Spain."

"Then let him save his powder," Concha remarked; but I saw that he was amazed, and could not conceal his vexation. "Let them wait a few minutes," Concha said; and he took counsel with his advisers, and while they whispered I could see that they directed their glances towards me, which looked as though I was the subject of their remarks. At length the conference ceased.

"Return the prisoner to the fort," Concha said. "We will examine him at some future time."

"And his treatment," suggested Armoranda. "Do you want him racked?"

"No, you fool! Treat him well until further orders. Go."

The soldiers saluted, and we left the apartment by a different door from the one which we entered. We hurried through the back corridor, and reached the court-yard, where stood the consul's carriage, and also the vehicle which brought me from the fort. The soldiers seemed anxious to leave the grounds of the palace as soon as possible, for fear they should encounter some one who might ask them their business; and after we were seated in the carriage, I inquired of Armoranda if such was not the case.

"We were fearful that the captain general would send us word to give you a taste of the torture. That was the reason we hurried off."

I hinted that I thought they feared to meet the American consul.

"I tell you what," said Armoranda, after a moment's pause,

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"I was really fearful that you was going to get a taste of the rack after we reached the castle; you spoke up rather short at one time — much more bold than the count dared to, even with all his wealth."

"And you took good care to remind Concha that a little racking would suit you," I remarked.

The Spaniard smiled gloomily.

"I must confess that I like to see the flesh quiver, and the muscles strain until they are ready to crack; but with you it is different; you have killed Englishmen, and that is enough to satisfy me you don't deserve punishment. I had to mention the rack, and if his excellency had ordered it, I should have applied it rather light, you may rest assured of that."

I had but little faith in the man's assertion, but I would not quarrel with him, so held my peace until the vehicle once more entered the gates of the fort, and they were closed after us with a sullen crash, that must have sent a chill to the heart of many a criminal, confined at the Castle for state purposes.

In the office of the fort I found, to my surprise, Don Riejo, from whom I had chartered the Coquette. He greeted me warmly.

"I have waited here," he said, "for nearly two hours, so that I would be certain to see you; for the instant I was informed of your return to port, and imprisonment, I obtained permission for an interview. Things have worked badly, but it is all owing to that old fool, Don Ingracia, who will be sorry for what he has done, or I am mistaken. Don't think that your friends have all deserted you, for they have not. We will remain as true to you as though you were still engaged in the slave trade, and money shall not be wanting to aid your cause. At present Concha is furious, but he will calm down in a few days, or as soon as he sees that you have powerful friends. He is not a man to run in direct opposition to the wishes of those out of whom he sometimes makes a pretty sum."

"But how can you go to work to effect my release?" I asked.

"There are several ways. In the first place, let me know what the lady will say, under all circumstances."

"She will tell the truth," I answered, promptly.

"Yes, yes; I have no doubt of that, but I wish to know if it is the truth we want just at this time. A word or two may ruin all our plans, especially if those words happen to tell against us. What will she swear to? That is what I want to know."

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I told him as briefly as possible, and he listened to every word attentively.

"You are sure that she will stick to that?" the Don asked, eagerly.

"I am positive that if she is in her right senses she will," I answered.

"In her right senses," muttered the Don; "how do we know whether she will be in her right senses at the proper moment? I have heard of such things as drugging and filling the mind with denunciations, when in a sane moment the whole would be repudiated. But I must set a watch over the Don and his daughter, and see that she is not tampered with. It is the safest course. If she testifies to what you have said, there is not much danger but your life will be spared. As a last resort, we have money, and that will accomplish much in this island."

He hurried from the office, and Armoranda conducted me to my chamber, or cell, whichever the reader may please to call it.

A man thinks of many things when all alone, with nothing better to occupy his time; therefore it is not wonderful if I did light a good cigar, and build castles with nothing more substantial than smoke. Two glasses of wine changed me into a hopeful and enthusiastic lover once more, and I was inclined to laugh at the fancies, dull and solemn, which had filled my brain but a few minutes before. I ate of the fruit which I found upon the tray, finished part of a roast chicken stuffed with olives and spice, and then concluded with a third glass of wine, with which I drank the health of Gracia; but hardly had I concluded when I heard Armoranda's footsteps in the corridor, and the gleaming of a light flashed through the cracks of the door.

I hoped that he brought me some cheering intelligence, and was prepared to give him a hearty welcome when he unlocked the door; but he entered the room cold and stern, and was followed by the blacks who had visited me once before. To my surprise, the latter were laden with two large trays, and upon them were hot coffee of most delicious fragrance, a supper of chicken, eggs, and tomatoes, vegetables and sweetmeats, and two more bottles of wine of the same brand as that which I was supplied with before. There was also a huge jug of water, a wash-bowl and towels; and when the slaves arranged the whole, they left the cell without a word, leaving half a dozen wax candles for me to burn during the night if I was so disposed.

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"This is not a bad arrangement for a state prisoner," said Armoranda, pointing to the feast and its appearance.

I thought that it was not.

"All that you have to do is to eat and make yourself comfortable. I'm going to take good care of you for two reasons. First, I am paid by some one for it, and secondly, you killed those Englishmen, and deserve it on that account."

Soon after daylight the next morning I was awakened by the noise of a drum and trumpet, turning out the soldiers of the fort to their daily duties; and in a few minutes Armoranda unlocked my door, and brought in hot coffee and fresh bread. The forenoon passed slowly enough; but towards noon I received a visit from Francisco, who had, by the aid of Senor Riejo, obtained a pass to see me, from the captain general, after much persuasion.

"I have not lost a moment's time," my friend said, "since we parted on the deck of the Coquette. But I will give you a complete history of what I have done, and then you will understand me much better."

"Have a drink first," I suggested, seeing that he looked tired and thirsty.

My suggestion met with his approval. He drank, was refreshed, and continued: —

"I waited on board of the schooner until the captain of the port returned from landing you at the Castle, and saw him take the Lady Gracia on shore. I followed in a boat, and tracked the party to Don Ingracia's palace. I need not tell you that the senorita was deeply affected, and shed many tears. Her father met her in the court-yard of his house, but manifested no feeling of joy at seeing her; and, to tell the truth, I am glad that he did not, for had he appeared rejoiced at once more greeting her, she would have had some reluctance at leaving him the second time.

"Well, I saw her safely housed, and found by the servants that a journey was not contemplated to the country; but for fear that such would be the case, I stationed a man to watch the house, and to give me information if a start was made; and then I went to the firm of Riejo & Co., and astonished them very much with my account of what had transpired. They hardly knew what to do or how to proceed; for you see the highest person on the island had interested himself in the matter, and he don't stand for trifles, I can tell you.

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"At length Riejo went to the American consul's, and Neali and myself to the Growler, which had dropped anchor by this time. Our object was to prevent the government from seizing on the schooner, by stating that it was chartered to an American. We had an interview with Captain Bluff, and that gentleman was furious at the manner in which you had been treated. He swore very much that he would not salute the forts until you were safe on board the Coquette, as per agreement; and to make all sure of the latter, he sent a boat's crew on board and towed the Coquette under the guns of the frigate, and she is lying there now. Then he drank several glasses of brandy, and made us do the same, although we did not like to; and on shore the captain went to find the consul, and have an interview with the captain general. What was done I don't know for certain, but I think that favorable promises were made."

My friend Francisco poured out and drank several glasses of wine before he could recover his breath. After he had quenched his thirst, I asked, —

"And what of Gracia? Have you seen her to-day?"

"Only for a moment, and then I could not speak to her. I was in the court-yard of her house, disguised as a fruit-vender, and saw her at a window. She was very pale, and looked as though she had been weeping, as I have no doubt she had. I have a man who stands near the house night and day, and not a soul can leave it without his notice."

"And you cannot learn what they have concluded to do with me?" I asked, after a moment's pause.

"The American consul don't know, and Captain Bluff is on board his ship drilling the crew, as though he really meant fight."

We were silent for some time, for both of us were paying our respects to the wine, and I was thinking of poor Gracia and her tears.

"I know that Riejo, this morning, attempted to see the captain general, but was not successful. He means to offer him five thousand dollars in your behalf. This shows that he has some friendship for you."

While we were conversing, Armoranda entered the room, and informed me that it was time I should make my appearance before Concha, who expected me at twelve o'clock, and did not like to wait five minutes. He didn't understand trifling.

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Acting upon this hint, Francisco left me with the promise to keep a protecting eye upon Gracia, and watch the movements of her father, and that he would call again the next day if it were possible to obtain a pass. We shook hands most cordially, and I saw a tear in his eye as he thought of my imprisonment and his own freedom.

I dressed, and left the fort, as I did the day before, confined in a close carriage, and guarded by the two soldiers and Armoranda. But I noticed that the soldiers had changed their sullen aspect for one that was much more pleasing, and even smiled upon me. Could it be possible that they had felt the influence of gold, and that some one had slipped into their palms a few broad ounces — those tempters which corrupt both man and woman, and by which friendship is bought and sold.

We reached the palace a few minutes past one o'clock, and were received by an officer, who ranked like one of our sergeants in the regular army; and a most important feeling person he was, whisking in his hand a small cane, which he seemed continually inclined to lay upon the backs of the soldiers who stood near the door, and who appeared to dread that such might be the case, by the alacrity with which they stirred.

"Come, move, lads, move," cried the sergeant, with a wave of his hand, and a flourish of his cane, as the door of the carriage was opened, and I was assisted out.

Concha did not look any more amiable than he did the day before. He gazed at me for a moment without speaking. I could read in his face that he was mentally revolving in his mind what kind of torture he should expose me to; and it would have taken but little to have sent me back to the fort, and given me a taste of the rack and dripping water. Indeed, Armoranda pricked up his ears as though expecting an order; but his excellency controlled his jealousy and hate sufficiently to spare the torture, for which I take this method of thanking him most sincerely. There was a solemn silence for a few minutes, and then Concha turned to one of his council.

"Are Don Ingracia and his daughter in attendance?" the captain general asked.

"They are, your excellency."

"Then admit them."

The gentleman addressed went out for a moment, and I waited

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with impatience for a glimpse of Gracia's sweet face. At length she entered the room, leaning upon the arm of the old gentleman who was sent for her. How lovely she looked, although quite pale! but there was such an expression of angelic resignation on her face that I could have fallen down and worshipped her; and as it was I started towards her, but the soldiers interposed, and refused to allow me to have any communication with her.

Gracia was dressed in white muslin, and wore no ornaments excepting a red rose in her hair; but never had I seen her look better, although at her father's house I had met her in company when diamonds flashed upon her arms and neck, and when rich silks covered her form, and gems sparkled in her hair.

As soon as Gracia saw me, she extended her arms, and would have advanced towards me; but the old gentleman who had charge of her apparently did not approve of such a course, and gently detained her, and finally conducted her to a seat; while Don Ingracia, after staring at me for a moment with silent indignation, was rash enough to shake his fist at me, which even provoked a grin from the captain general, who looked up just in time to see the gesture.

As soon as all were seated excepting myself and the soldiers, the great man of the party spoke.

"Prisoner," he said, "our friend Don Ingracia has stated that you abducted his daughter, and that you killed Captain Martenello, both on the same night. For certain reasons I have made this a state affair, and instead of allowing you a trial by jury, I shall act as judge. What do you say to the charge?"

"Not guilty," I replied.

"Don Ingracia, let us hear from you on the subject. Your information is of importance. Speak."

The old Spaniard arose, and without looking at me commenced: —

"Some few days before my daughter was abducted, I told the prisoner that she was destined to be united in marriage to Captain Martenello, to whom no objection could be offered on account of birth and fortune. I asked his co-operation in the project, because I thought that he might have some influence with my child, the prisoner having once saved her life."

"Did the prisoner promise his influence?" asked Concha.

"He did, and for it I was to reward him. I did this because

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I had been warned that the American was regarding her with more than friendly feeling, and, as far as my daughter was concerned, it was necessary to crush out any hope that he might have entertained. I thought that I had succeeded by the aid of money; but the American deceived me, as they deceive every one with whom they trade."

"Confine yourself to the subject," Concha said, a little tartly, I thought.

"Yes, your excellency. I suspected nothing, and thought that my plans would surely succeed; but a few nights after my conversation with the American I was awakened by a terrible commotion in the house, and found, to my dismay, that my daughter had left me and fled with the stranger, or else that he had forcibly abducted her. The latter supposition I have since found to be correct. Captain Martenello and myself followed on horseback as rapidly as possible, and overtook the fugitives; when we were attacked by the American and his slave, and the captain was killed just as he had cut down the black. I thought that they might have a reserved force; so I made my escape as fast as possible, and alarmed the garrison at San Jaquith, and then came and made complaint to your excellency."

"Does the lady support your testimony?" asked Concha.

"You can question her, your excellency," was the answer.

Gracia looked up with such an expression upon her face that I wanted to whisper words of encouragement to her, but the confounded soldiers would not permit me.

"I am sorry that my testimony must conflict with my father's," Gracia said, in a low tone, yet so perfectly distinct every word was heard in that quiet room. "My father is laboring under a mistake when he says that the Senor Robert removed me from home by force. Such was not the case. I left of my own will, and I left joyfully; for I would never have married the man my father assigned me, for he possessed no qualities that commanded my respect or confidence."

"Do not heed her, your excellency," cried the Don. "I think that her senses have left her."

"My senses have not left me; but I fear that they will, unless the senor who has treated me so kindly and saved my life and honor is represented correctly," Gracia exclaimed, with much earnestness.

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"She does not mean what she says," said Don Ingracia. "I, her father, have a right to represent her."

"But not misrepresent me," Gracia remarked, proudly.

The eyes of the captain general were fixed upon her with an expression of deep admiration. I could see by his face that her wonderful beauty had produced an effect upon him; but whether it was likely to benefit me was a question that I did not dare ask, for the reputation of Concha as a gallant was high, for some of his amours were well known at Havana.

"Let the lady speak without any hinderance," Concha cried, after a moment's pause. "Do not again interrupt. The saints forbid that I should do any injustice here, for if she loves this young man —"

"But she does not, your excellency," interrupted Don Ingracia.

"Silence, senor, and let the lady conclude her testimony."

"I fled from my father's house with the only one whom I can love enough to accept as a husband. The step was not a hasty one; I considered it well days before it was taken. I preferred happiness and love to wealth and neglect. That is the manner in which I was abducted."

"And that charge falls to the ground," said Concha, with a look of admiration at Gracia. "What say you, senors?" he continued, turning to the council; "can we sustain the charge which has been brought against the American?"

"Let me bring other evidence before you decide," cried Don Ingracia, who feared that I should escape his toils, after all.

"There is no occasion for it. The prisoner is free," the captain general said.

Gracia sprang towards me with a wild cry of delight, and I prepared to meet her, but was detained by the soldiers, who prevented me from moving, although I could easily have dashed them both to the floor, had I been so disposed.

"One moment," said Concha; "I said free of that charge. There are others against him which no doubt can be proved; and now we will come to the killing of Captain Martenello. Come, Don Ingracia, let us hear the history of that."

"He killed the captain, your excellency, as I stated before. I have no new facts to repeat, unless I should add that he would have killed me also, had I not made my escape."

"Let the lady be questioned on that point," I said, in answer to a look from Concha.

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Poor Gracia again repeated her story, and related, in faltering accents, the death of the negro, the attack upon me, and the manner in which I resisted it by killing Captain Martenello. Her father looked as though he could have struck her senseless while she was speaking.

Concha and the council conferred together, and the result was, that Gracia's innocence and frankness produced such an effect I was declared not guilty of the crime charged; and I began to think that I was progressing finely, when a messenger entered the room, and said that he desired to speak to the captain general.

"Well, sir; what is wanting?" Concha asked, impatiently.

"The American frigate Roarer has just entered the harbor, senor, and the captain refuses to salute the forts until an American, now in confinement, is released."

"Then she can remain silent," was the answer.

"But, your excellency, the captain of the Roarer and the captain of the Growler are waiting for a reply."

"Then let them wait until they tire," was the uncivil answer; and Concha was about to resume the examination, when I heard Captain Bluff's voice, and the next instant the door of the room was opened, and in walked two naval officers.

"Hullo, Shackle! we've found a harbor, after all; and, by the piper that played before Moses, here's the old man as large as life, and twice as natural."

This was said in English, and was intended to apply to Concha, who looked for a moment as cross as a bear with good appetite and short rations.

The reason why the two officers had entered so unceremoniously was because, while in the hall, some one of the captain general's officers had said that Concha was in the room and waiting for them, and in they bolted without further notice; and gratified enough I was to see them, for if the mistake had not been made, I should have missed the interview.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE YANKEE CAPTAINS AND THEIR INTERVIEW WITH CONCHA.—A CONCESSION.—A POSTPONEMENT.—A PERMIT TO LEAVE—ON BOARD THE GRWLER.

Captain Bluff, as I said before, entered the chamber where the hearing was going on, and after one startling exclamation, cast his keen gray eyes around the room for the purpose of taking an observation, and in so doing it was but natural that he should see me.

"Blast my eyes, Shackle, if here ain't the chap that I was telling you about! Well, old fellow, how does the land lay, hey? All shoals ahead? And here is the lass, too, looking as white as a new main royal, and twice as handsome. Cheer up, my dear; we'll have you out of this muss, or we'll box compasses with the captain general afore many days."

And the captain, who had really got his bearings, and knew how the land lay at last, crossed over to where I was, and shook hands with me as cordially as though I stood upon his quarter-deck; and from me he went to Gracia, and almost crushed her little hand in his huge paw.

"Well, what in thunder is this all about, hey?" asked Captain Bluff, who seemed to take the lead in everything, and left poor Captain Shackle away to the leeward, beating about in wonder and amazement. "I want to know why you are not released. That is what I want to know, and I mean to wait for an answer."

All this time the captain general had watched proceedings with as much astonishment as it is possible for a Spaniard to show, and yet he had not said one word. I noticed, however, that he had touched a bell which was just behind his chair, but whether it was to summon servants or soldiers was more than I could tell. I knew that Concha was a resolute man, and would meet force with force; but I did not think that Captain Bluff would proceed to extremities.

As soon as there was a pause, Concha spoke with dignity, and made some little impression.

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"I do not recognize your right to interrupt proceedings in this manner, but I shall, for the sake of harmony, overlook it this time. I can always be approached, but I want that formality, which is due my position, to be observed. Let the lady and the prisoner retire."

The soldiers were about to carry out Concha's wishes, but Captain Bluff interrupted, and laid one hand upon my shoulder.

"For two days," the captain said, "I have attempted to board this chap, so that I could overhaul him; but you have refused me on some pretext or other. I now ask that he remain in this room at present, or until we can settle a little business relating to him."

"Such a course would be without precedent, and would result in no good. The prisoner is confined for state reasons; but, for all that, he shall have every chance that can be used for his safety. This you have my word for."

"I have no objection to your word," Captain Bluff said, "for I s'pose one man's word is as good as another's unless one of 'em lies, and then it ain't. But that is neither here nor there. Shackle and I have come here in the hope of prevailing upon you to release the man. He hain't done any harm, and if he has, he was provoked to it, and you can't blame him for that. We don't want to make a fuss, and raise the devil generally, 'cos it would not benefit either of us; but we must do something for our reputation, or we shall be laughed at."

The soldiers looked from the captain general to Captain Bluff, and hardly knew which to mind. At length, to their great relief, Concha nodded to them to let me remain, and then they fell back a pace or two.

"I have no wish to involve Spain in a war with the United States," said Concha, in a grave tone; "but the honor of our nation must be preserved. The American has fired upon my soldiers, and upon a national ship; and for those offences he must be responsible. If he can prove that he is blameless in the premises, I shall release him most promptly. But until he offers such evidence, I shall hold him."

"But, blast it all, sir," cried Captain Bluff, "your old coffee-pot, the steamer Furious, fired upon the schooner first, and should have knocked the craft all out of the water. I heard three shots before the Yankee returned the fire. I'll swear to it."

"The captain of the steamer tells me a different story," remarked the captain general, rather gravely.

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"Then he tells a cussed lie, and I'll say so to his face!" roared Bluff. "A man that will say such a thing as that, when he knows it ain't true, don't deserve the name of sailor. He's a sojer, and a poor one at that, and I would not give him ship-room on board the Growler. Would you, Shackle?"

"Certainly not," was the prompt answer.

"I have the word of the captain and the first lieutenant that such was the case," Concha remarked, in a quiet tone; and perhaps he had, but it seemed hardly possible that two men could tell such shocking lies. Besides, it was pretty well understood that Concha uttered statements and facts to suit himself sometimes.

"Shackle, let us go and find them sojers, and give 'em the lie, and then fight 'em," cried Captain Bluff.

"I'm ready; heave ahead," was the prompt reply.

"I shall allow no fighting on the island," Concha remarked, rather sharply.

"I don't know how you can help yourself," was the impudent rejoinder of Captain Bluff. "If we can't fight on land we can on the water, and we have nine hundred men to back us."

Concha bit his lips, and the council frowned. I feared that the captain would do me more harm than good by his angry remarks, and I would have given much for the privilege of saying a few words, and smoothing over his roughness. But the soldiers took good care to prevent me from doing so, and I was therefore forced to remain a spectator of the disagreeable scene, which, although intended for my good, was not much calculated to benefit me.

There was an awkward pause for a few moments, and it was evident that Concha was undecided what to say. A reply was on his lips, and if he had uttered it, the two captains would have left the palace with vengeance in their hearts; but by a powerful effort the captain general stifled the hot words, and merely smiled.

"What we want," said Captain Bluff, in a tone of voice a little more moderate, "is the discharge of our countryman, and we shall not remain satisfied until he is free. He was taken from the schooner after an express condition that he should have a fair trial, and should not be made a prisoner. I'm a party to that condition, and my honor is concerned."

"Then call again to-morrow, and we will have further con-

versation on the subject," Concha remarked. "I trust that this matter can be adjusted peaceably. Let the American return to prison, and there await our orders."

The soldiers were about to lead me from the room, when Captain Bluff once more spoke, and quite cheerfully this time.

"I hope your excellency will let the lad and lass exchange a few signals afore they are separated. They are almost dying to speak to each other."

"Certainly. Let the lady and gentleman converse together for ten minutes before they are separated," was Concha's reply.

I hurried to Gracia, and there, in the presence of the whole company, she threw her arms around my neck, and laid her head upon my shoulder. Don Ingracia started towards us as though to interpose, but the old gentleman, who had charge of the lady, kept him back, and would not let him hear our discourse.

"Courage, Gracia," I whispered; "our struggles are most over. In a few days I shall be free, I think, and then we will leave the island without molestation."

"If I could only think so," she replied, "I should be happy, and would cheerfully submit to the anger of my father."

"You must not leave the city," I said; "and if you are compelled to, do not fail of sending some one to Francisco, and inform him where you are going. Do you comprehend me?"

"Yes, yes," she murmured.

"And you still love me?" I asked.

"O, better than ever," she cried, eagerly; and in the presence of all those men she threw her arms around my neck and pressed her lips to mine.

"O, Lord!" groaned Captain Bluff, when he saw such an exhibition of affection, "that reminds me of my old woman, and the day that I was spliced. Say, Shackle, what do you think of that?"

"Think!" repeated Shackle, who was a matter-of-fact man, and had no nonsense about him, "why, I think they should be spliced afore another dog watch."

"Shackle," cried Captain Bluff, "you are a man of sense. Give me your paw. I am proud to think that you belong to the United States navy. Long may you wave."

Even the captain general, who was regarding the scene with interest, and some envy, I thought, suffered a grim smile to pass

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over his thin features as he witnessed the enthusiasm of the naval officers and the devotion of Gracia.

I had just released the lady from my arms when Don Ingracia, her father, stepped forward, as though to speak to me. I extended my hand, but he did not notice it, or pretended not to.

"Do you still think that I have wronged you?" I asked of the proud Spaniard.

"More than your life can atone for," was the answer.

"Do I deserve such treatment?" I asked. "Do I deserve at your hands such false evidence? You know you stated things unfairly, and yet I once saved your life and your daughter's."

"Do not dare to speak to me," the Spaniard said, with intense bitterness. "You have wronged me. Give me back my child, while you return to the prison which you deserve."

I was hurried from the room, and did not see that Gracia had fainted and fallen into her father's arms.

I hardly spoke a word on my way back to Moro Castle, for I felt that my feelings were not under control, and but little would have been required to make me exhibit some weakness, which I was desirous of not gratifying my enemies with a sight of. I leaned back in the carriage and closed my eyes, and by such means avoided conversation until we reached the Castle, where I was agreeably surprised to find Don Riejo and Francisco, both awaiting me in the office.

"I presume," asked the Don of Armoranda, "that we can dine with the prisoner, if we are so disposed."

Armoranda was not so sure of that. He had received rather stringent orders about me, and did not like to take too much responsibility.

"Then we will dine in the American's apartment, and you shall furnish the dinner. As long as it is a good one, I don't care what it costs;" and the Don slipped two gold ounces in the hand of the watchful officer, and it was marvellous to see how quick his face changed from a look of gloom to one of gladness.

"I think I can manage it," he said, after a moment's hesitation, putting the money in his pocket with a grace and independence peculiar to Spaniards; and taking a key from its accustomed peg, he led the party to the chamber which I called home.

Locking the door upon us, after a wise admonition not to make a noise and attract too much attention, the officer left us to con-

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verse as much as we pleased, and to refresh ourselves with a few bottles of the deceased count's much prized wine.

"I suppose," said the Don Riejo, "that you are anxious to hear what news we have brought you. I can answer at once. We have none of importance, although you must not suppose that we have been idle. We have been active, and if we have not worked upon Concha, I can tell you that his advisers have been sounded, and will speak at the right time. This is something to be depended upon. Now tell us what passed at the examination to-day."

I related, as near as I could recollect, all that had ensued, and also the violent scene between the American officers and the captain general.

"That will do for Concha to sleep upon," was the remark of Riejo. "He will now know that that brandy-drinking captain is in earnest, and means to give him trouble if your imprisonment is insisted upon. I think that to-morrow will bring forth something of importance, and until that time we must eat, sleep, and drink as usual. I wish that savage would bring the dinner, for I am as hungry as a *cargadoro*."

Just at that moment there was a shuffling of feet in the passage-way, and the door opening revealed four slaves bearing dishes of food and a table; and as they were marshalled about the room in arranging things, I could see that the two ounces, which were in Armoranda's pocket, were doing wonders to make the meal a success.

The dinner was a good one, for it was cooked outside of the fort at a neighboring hotel, and by the order of Francisco, who knew that money would soften the officer's heart, and had whispered what had been done as soon as permission was given to dine at the fort.

There was an abundance of wine and some excellent cigars, and what more could we have wished for excepting freedom? The loss of that was a drawback, but as long as I was surrounded by pleasant companions I did not think so much of my imprisonment. Riejo grew jovial, and sang two or three songs, most of them love ditties, and when he had concluded, Francisco needed but little urging to favor us with a specimen of his tenor, and thus the afternoon passed pleasantly until they left me alone.

By nine o'clock Armoranda furnished me with coffee and wax

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candles, and intimated that at any hour I chose to leave the Castle in the morning, I was at liberty to do so; that I was not regularly discharged, for Concha could not humiliate himself so much as that; but no one was to notice me when I left, and on the records was to be entered, opposite my name, "Escaped." By such means did the Spaniard hope to avoid the responsibility which he had assumed, and to prevent any further importunities on the part of Captain Bluff and the American consul.

After that information the officer vanished, and I saw no more of him until the next morning. Armoranda was determined that I should not leave his quarters without a substantial breakfast, and to it he modestly invited himself, for the purpose, I suppose, of showing me how high I stood in his estimation, and how much he regretted that he was to lose my company.

"I hope," said my guest, as he seated himself at the table, "that you will find as clever a fellow as me to look after you in case of another imprisonment. You have been treated as well as I know how to treat a prisoner, and if you have not enjoyed yourself it is not my fault."

I complimented Armoranda upon the admirable manner in which he had discharged his duties, and hinted that a handsome sum would be placed at his disposal after I left the fort; but, to my surprise, he refused all pecuniary compensation.

"I've been amply repaid," he said, "for all the trouble I have taken in your behalf, and even if I had received nothing, I should consider the Englishmen whom you have killed, more than a sufficient offset for any claims that I have. When you are free, just kill some more, and you will oblige me."

Very soon after breakfast I left the room I had occupied, and entered the office where I found Armoranda writing, and too busy to notice me.

"I suppose I can leave the castle now?" I asked.

There was no response. The man did not even look up.

"Do you wish me to remain?" I again inquired.

"I will tell you what," said Armoranda; "if you should leave this office with the intention of escaping, you would be disappointed, for a soldier at the gate would demand the password, and unless you could say 'Spain,' it is extremely probable that you would be fired at. I will not say shot, for our soldiers are not noted as marksmen;" and the man recommenced writing as though he had not a moment to lose.

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"Well, good by," I said, extending my hand; for the fellow had been kind to me, and I recollected the hint which I had received about leaving the night before.

"Good by," he repeated. "You are going to your room, I see. I will have dinner for you in season, and more wine than you can drink in a day, unless your stomach is endless."

I cast a glance around the Castle yard, and saw that the soldiers were scattered about in groups, smoking and playing cards, and some cleaning their arms.

"Now or never," I thought; and towards the gate I started at a moderate pace.

No one seemed to notice me, but I could not help thinking, that perhaps the whole affair was a ruse to get me shot and out of the way with as little trouble as possible; and then the captain general could throw the whole blame upon my rashness in seeking to escape while negotiations were pending for release. But I cheered myself with the reflection that I had passed through greater dangers, and that liberty was never to be obtained without some risk.

As I neared the soldier, I saw that he was as villanous looking scamp as ever I had met with in my life. In fact, he was just the man whom one would pick out as capable of any crime, and a jury of twelve men would have convicted him of murder, even if there had been no direct proof of the charge.

As I neared the sentry he glanced towards me, threw his musket into the hollow of his arm, and shouted,—

"Who comes?"

"Spain," I replied.

"Good—pass, Spain;" and when I was opposite the fellow, he smiled and asked, "Has the senor a cigar that he would like to spare?"

I handed him half a dozen, and it astonished me to find that he was really a pleasant-looking fellow, after all.

"A thousand thanks, senor. The saints have you in their keeping in your journey through life. Adieu."

I passed on, but I could not help glancing over one shoulder to see if the sentry was aiming at my back. But no, he was examining his cigars, and had no thoughts of murder, at that time, at any rate. I considered that I had done the man injustice, and had some thoughts of returning and apologizing; but my engagements were rather of a pressing character just then, and, besides, I did not consider that it was right to tempt Providence.

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In a few minutes I was out of sight of the soldier, but I did not consider myself entirely out of danger. I walked rapidly, to the astonishment of some loungers who were viewing the outside of the Castle, and speculating how long it would take a fleet to batter down its walls, and capture the city with its store of tobacco and cigars. At length I saw a volante and driver under a tree, and apparently waiting for some one.

"Are you engaged?" I asked.

"Yes, senor; to some one who is to be driven to the man-of-war mole."

"I am the man," I said; and, with a spring, I took my seat in the vehicle. "Now drive as though the devil was after you."

"He is after me, senor," said the fellow, with a merry glance at his passenger; and, giving his horse a cut, we dashed through the streets on our journey.

I left the volante at the head of the mole, and walked down through the crowd to see if I could find some men belonging to the Growler; but none were there, and I began to think that I had better hire a boat and leave the city without delay, when I saw the first cutter of the frigate, with all the crew on board, lying at the end of the mole, as though waiting for some one. A midshipman was seated in the stern-sheets, smoking as though he had but a few moments to live, and wanted to consume as many cigars as possible before he died. His cap was pulled over his eyes so that I could not see his face; but I thought I knew him, and therefore hailed.

"Can you give me a passage on board of the Growler?" I asked.

The middy looked up and pulled the cap from his face. I saw that he was the same one who had carried me on board the Growler the first time I had stepped upon her decks.

"Hullo!" the young fellow said; "we have been waiting for you ever since eight bells, and I began to think that we should lose you. Oars, boys, and pull in to the mole. So, that will do. Jump aboard, sir, and we'll put you alongside the frigate quicker than it could be done by any boat the size of this in the harbor. Shove off, bow. Give way with a will, and let those Englishmen see that you know how to pull an oar. Long strokes, boys, and bend your backs. That is the talk."

We shot past the merchant ships, and soon came in sight of the

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men-of-war lying at anchor near each other; and conspicuous among them all was the Growler frigate, with her square stern and heavy bow, and double row of guns frowning upon the harbor, as though sullen from a fit of spleen. As the cutter ran alongside, I heard the shrill pipes of the boatswain's mates.

"Blast me if the lieutenant isn't piping the side for one of us," the midshipman muttered, in astonishment. "It can't be that Congress has at last discovered my merits, and made me a captain, hey?"

I did not answer this wonderful supposition, but went up the steps first, and was met by the side boys with uncovered heads in honor of my arrival, which was a mark of respect I had not anticipated. But, if I felt any embarrassment, I was soon relieved from it by the action of the first lieutenant, who, as I reached the deck, came towards me and grasped my hand.

"I am glad to welcome you once more to the deck of the Growler," he said, "and I trust that the next time we part, it will be with feelings of mutual satisfaction."

I pressed his hand warmly, and expressed my gratification at once more standing beneath the flag of my country, a free man.

"We had some trouble to bring the captain general to his senses, and at one time I thought we should have to play at long shots with him. But I am glad that we did not have to fight against odds, for when I fight I want to win, and wooden walls are not a match for stone ones. But come into the cabin, for the captain wants to see you, and he won't thank me for keeping you here all day."

I followed the lieutenant to the captain's cabin, where I found Captains Bluff and Shackle, gorgeous in uniforms and lace, sitting at a table drinking brandy and water, as though their lives depended upon the quantity which they consumed within a given time.

"By Jove, Shackle, here he is, sure enough," roared Captain Bluff, as I entered the cabin; and the captain jumped up and squeezed my hand until it ached, while Shackle, the cool matter-of-fact individual, merely said, —

"Devilish glad to see you, sir. Take a drink of this brandy. It's prime."

"Shackle, you're a man of sense," cried Captain Bluff, returning to the table, and pouring out enough brandy to flood a jolly

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boat. "Let's imbibe all round, and drink confusion to the greasers."

"By the way," said the captain, after a pause, "you must dine with me to-day, and if you wish to make any change in your costume, you can take one of the cutters and go on board of the Coquette. I'm sorry that confounded custom compels all guests to dress as though they were going to some land-lubber's evening party. I like to take my grub in my shirt sleeves."

As I was dressed in light clothes, I saw the necessity of the hint, and resolved to visit the schooner at once, and see how matters were progressing on board the vessel. Captain Bluff sent word to the officer of the deck to man the cutter, and, after declining a pressing invitation to take another drink, I left the ship and was pulled direct to the schooner. I was received by Mr. Prentice, the chief mate, with every mark of joy and surprise.

"Darn my eyes," he exclaimed, "but this is somethin' to make a man feel good. I didn't expect you for a month; but while you've been gone I've turned in the lower rigging, and pointed the end of the shrouds, got things to lookin' pretty well; but I ain't satisfied yet."

"Never mind that now," I said, casting my eyes over the deck, and seeing that everything looked ship-shape. "Tell me if the crew are well, and if you have had any trouble."

"All hands are hearty, and we hain't had a bit of trouble since we moved under the guns of the frigate. We are ready to go to sea in five minutes if the order only comes."

I was rejoiced at this, for I did not know but that it might be necessary for me to move at short notice, and told the mate to keep his eye upon the Growler, and watch her signals.

I entered the cabin, and found that everything looked as neat as the day I left the vessel for quarters in Moro Castle. Not a single article had been displaced from my state-room and Gracia's; and I knew this was owing to the mate's forethought and care, and I pleased him much by commenting upon it.

I dressed myself in my best black suit, with the exception of a white vest (they were fashionable in those days), and after treating the crew of the cutter to a stiff glass of grog, returned to the frigate; but saw before I was alongside that there was a great commotion on board, as though some event of importance had

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happened, or was about to happen. The men were dressed in clean white frocks and trousers, and shining tarpaulin hats, and were gathered upon the top-gallant forecastle, upon the booms, and every available point upon deck, as though they wanted to see all that was going on in the amusement line.

"Why are the men dressed in their Sunday rig?" I asked of the midshipman.

"Some freak of the captain's," he replied; and the next instant we were alongside.

Captains Bluff and Shackle were walking the quarter-deck with all the awful dignity of their positions. Every one was kept at a distance while thus promenading, for who could tell that they were not debating upon the fate of nations?

At length Captain Bluff paused in his walk and motioned me to approach, while his little gray eyes twinkled with mischief and cognac. He looked me all over from truck to keelson, and then turned to Shackle.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"He'll do," grunted Shackle, with a nod.

"Blowed if I don't think so. Shall the thing go on, or shall we heave to where we are, and wait for daylight and soundings?"

"Squally weather," returned Shackle. "Better make a run for it, and head for port."

"Right, old fellow; we'll heave ahead. Order up the band, Mr. Harvey, and tell the chaplain to overhaul his lines and get them ready. Tell him to pick out the strongest words that he can find in the whole book, and reel off a yarn that will tell."

At length the band appeared upon the quarter-deck, and struck up a lively march; and then from the cabin issued a procession, the sight of which struck me dumb with astonishment and delight. First came Gracia, leaning upon the arm of the American consul, and looking confused and pleased at the same time. Then came Captains Bluff and Shackle, and after them Don Riejo and Francisco. I was never more astonished in my life, and could hardly believe that I was not dreaming, and that I should not awake and find myself once more in Moro Castle a prisoner.

I saw at once that there had been some conspiring for the purpose of keeping me in ignorance of what was going on, and thus giving me an agreeable surprise; and I looked upon Captains Bluff and Shackle as the chief conspirators.

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I sprang forward to welcome Gracia, but Captain Bluff waved me off with a majestic air.

"Avast there, shipmate," he said. "You can't board that prize till I give the word. She's under a convoy, and we are bound to protect her; so stand off on another tack till you get signals to bear down. Ain't that right, Shackle?"

"That's ship-shape," was the answer.

"But let me say but a few words to the lady," I pleaded.

"Not a whisper," was the answer. "After you are spliced you can lay alongside as fast as you please, but now you must sheer off until the parson hails. How's that, Shackle?"

"That's aboveboard," was the answer.

Poor Gracia looked as though she would have given much to speak to me; but her friends had arranged the programme, and she did not dare disarrange it. She had been told that she was to marry me, but that she must do so in a hurry for certain reasons, and that she must follow all directions. The poor, timid thing was easily frightened, and promised obedience.

"Harvey," asked the captain, "has the parson been piped?"

"Yes, sir, and will be here in a moment. He is overhauling the words, for he is a little rusty."

"Then, before he comes, I'd better say a word or two — hadn't I, Shackle?" Captain Bluff asked.

"Heave ahead," was the answer.

Thus encouraged, Captain Bluff motioned Gracia and myself to stand before him, and removing his hat, made a speech.

"You are about to be spliced," he said, "and you are going to sail over the ocean of life in company; but you'll meet with storms and tempests, and then you'll have to send down your top hamper, and make all snug aloft; for if you don't, you'll get dismasted, and perhaps water-logged. When it's calm you will have to be patient with each other, and trim your sails so that you can catch the faintest breath of air that's stirring, in hope of wafting you to that haven where there is no topsails to reef, and no storms, but trade winds blowing all the time; and they pipe to grog six times a day, besides allowing a feller a private bottle or two if he pleases. You must look out for squalls; and, if you see one rising, you must douse sail immediately, and be patient till it passes. As for the babies —"

"You're shoaling your water fast," muttered Shackle, in a warning manner.

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"So I am. Can I say anything more that will make 'em sail together any better?"

"Not another word," Shackle said. "You've preached like a log-book already; so don't make it too long, as they won't listen if you do."

At length the reverend gentleman made his appearance; and the band, wishing for their share of attention, immediately struck up "See, the Conquering Hero comes," which they considered appropriate, and rather complimentary to the chaplain than otherwise.

The reverend gentleman smiled at the singularity of the tune, and at any other time would have laughed most heartily, for he was as fond of a joke as any person on board the ship, and was therefore a great favorite of the sailors.

"Come, parson, crowd sail, and splice 'em as soon as possible," cried Captain Bluff.

"Are they in such a hurry?" asked the chaplain.

"Lord, they are all in a flurry, like a whale that has spouted blood. See how white they look about the gills, and then ask if they are in a hurry."

The chaplain stepped before us, and motioned that we should join hands. We did so; and I felt Gracia's tremble, and she partly leaned on me for support.

"Will you take this woman for your wife?" the chaplain asked, after a short prayer.

"I will."

"And will you take this man for your husband?"

"I will," so low that it was only heard by a few.

"Then I pronounce you man and wife, and may God bless you both, and your children, if you have any. Amen."

I was married so quick that I was not aware that the ceremony was concluded until I heard Captain Bluff shout, —

"Up with the flags, and let us have the salute."

And as he spoke, a string of flags, extending from the bowsprit to the taffrail, was run up, and at the same moment the guns of the frigate began to shake the vessel as they belched forth smoke, which circled in eddies around the ship, and then slowly drifted off to the leeward among the merchantmen.

"There," cried Captain Bluff, as the report of the last gun died away, "have I kept my word, Shackle?"

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"Of course you have. I knew you would," was the satisfactory reply.

I was seated with Gracia on a sofa which had been brought on deck for our accommodation, and was wondering at the salute, when the captain spoke.

"You see," the captain cried, "I swore that I wouldn't salute the forts till you were released and spliced, and I've kept my word, I guess."

"I guess so, too," Shackle muttered, seating himself upon the hammock netting and picking his teeth, with such earnest glances at Gracia that she blushed, and murmured in Spanish that the captain was a funny-looking man.

The salute from the frigate was promptly returned by the forts, and then the merchant ships, catching the enthusiasm, hoisted their flags, and many crews of the different vessels climbed into the tops for the purpose of overlooking the Growler and seeing what was going on. A dozen boats were plying around us, the inmates of which were regarding us with the utmost astonishment, and inquiring of each other what it was all about.

"Now," cried Captain Bluff, his red face beaming with brandy and excitement, "how do you feel, speaking between us and the mainmast?"

I intimated that I felt very happy, and Gracia bowed her fair head in token of her assent to that doctrine.

"I'm glad of it; and if you don't always feel so, call on me and Shackle, and we'll set you all right before you could fleet a messenger. Eh, Shackle?"

"Them's my sentiments. I go for that and more too," was the answer.

"Now we are going to have dinner, and then you can do as you please — take passage in the Growler for Boston, or join your own craft. My cabin is at your service; and there you can sling your hammocks and pass your honeymoon.

My wife blushed, and appeared to be occupied in arranging her dress while the blunt captain was talking.

I thought the matter over, and was decidedly in favor of returning to the Coquette, where I was my own master, and accountable to no one; but I determined to be governed entirely by Gracia.

"Let us return to the Coquette," she whispered. "There we

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can be alone, and enjoy the privacy of a home. It was there I learned to love you, and you learned to love me. I should be miserable surrounded by so many people."

I applauded her decision, and promised that I would be governed by it, and so stated to Captain Bluff.

"But let me send a gang of carpenters on board, and fit a berth up for you. It won't take more than an hour," the captain said.

That, too, for a very good reason, I also declined, and the captain thought what he should offer next.

"Let me send some brandy on board. Your wife may be sick."

"I have enough of that already."

"Then come and have dinner, for I see that it is on the table. Come, gentlemen, join me, and let us see who can be the most happy at the turn of affairs. We'll drink to our country and the bride. Come, follow me."

The captain led off, and I gave my arm to Gracia, and followed him and the rest of the company at their leisure; and thus we proceeded to the captain's cabin, where an elegant dinner was spread, most of the materials having been procured from shore expressly for the occasion.

Captain Bluff took the head of the table, and on his right were my wife and myself, and on his left were the American consul, Shackle, Riejo, and Francisco; while the officers of the frigate, and some few invited from the Roarer, were scattered around the table, according to their rank in the United States navy.

Among those present I was pleased to recognize my friend Lieutenant Nowell, to whose care I had intrusted the box containing the diamonds and precious stones which I had found on board of the Virgin; and I was glad to see that he had not forgotten his charge, for he approached and whispered, —

"I congratulate you on the successful termination of your adventures. You are to be envied. I have the casket safe, and will give it to you when you leave the ship."

I pressed his hand and breathed a little easier. It would have been something of a loss to have failed in getting back over a hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds.

"What did he mean by casket?" asked my wife.

"He meant you, my dear," I replied, gallantly.

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Gracia smiled, and looked at the young officer with some interest during the balance of the time that we were at dinner. So much for a good word fitly spoken.

I cannot say that I was brilliant at the table. I had seen so much to surprise me during the day that I was thoughtful but happy, and every time that I raised my eyes to my wife's blushing face, I saw no cause to be otherwise. I longed for the time when I could retire to privacy with her, and converse with her upon the many changes which we had witnessed during the six months of our acquaintance, and I knew that such was her wish; therefore, when the cloth was removed and my health and Gracia's proposed, I made a few remarks, thanking every one for the interest which he had taken in me and mine; and, after alluding to the American eagle and the flag of our country, sat down amidst thunders of applause, as the reporters say when alluding to some stupid orator, whom the public cheer when he lapses into silence.

After my speech the American consul made one, and spoke of protecting every citizen of America, from the poorest to the highest; and from the applause, I really think that it was believed.

Then Captain Bluff, his face looking more red than ever, arose and gazed upon every one in a dull, uncertain manner, before he let loose his eloquent tongue. He spoke as follows: —

"Why do I rise here?" he asked. But no one knew, and of course no one answered. "It is to congratulate the young folks who have been spliced this day on board the Growler. Am I wrong in saying that I hope their course through life will be clear of rocks and shoals?"

There were cries of "No," during which the captain took a drink — an example which Shackle followed without delay.

"May they always sling their hammocks in a craft that will mind its helm quick, and can carry sail without straining. Them's my sentiments."

There were immense cheers at this, and the guests began to take on board so much liquor that I thought it best to leave the table with my wife, and find peace on board of the Coquette. I therefore arose, and stated that I was compelled to retire on account of my wife's health, and for a wonder, Captain Bluff made no objections.

"Remember," he said, as he accompanied me from the cabin,

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"the frigate will get under way to-morrow morning, and you had better do the same. We are both bound for Boston. Let us sail in company, to prevent mistakes."

I agreed to that without much argument. We soon arrived alongside of the Coquette, the crew of which were rigged out in their best, and had made ample preparations for receiving me by dressing the schooner in flags from stem to stern, and by covering the decks fore and aft with awnings to protect the crew and guests from the hot sun.

We were soon on deck, and Mr. Prentice welcomed us in his Cape Codish style, which was more grateful than if he had used the language of courtiers, knowing as I did that it came from his heart.

All on board the schooner were stirring early the next morning in the expectation of our sailing, in company with the frigate. The decks were washed down and scrubbed dry, and all hands were piped to breakfast at seven bells, at which time the table in the cabin was spread, and my wife, Francisco, and myself sat down to partake of the meal. I can't say that it was really a pleasant one, for Francisco looked so piteous and doleful at the idea of parting, that I could not smile and feel as lively as usual, and Gracia was too retiring and modest to be really good company on the morning after her wedding. She made a desperate attempt to sustain her share in the conversation, but it was a failure, and she fell back upon her reflections, and I have no doubt they were pleasant.

But at last the breakfast terminated, and just at eight bells up went a signal from the Growler, which read, "Prepare to get under way;" but we were all ready, and waiting for the frigate to lead off; and we had but a short time to wait, for in a few minutes the noise of the fife was heard, and the stamping of the men as they worked the capstan, and roused up the ponderous chain by the aid of a messenger.

Suddenly the noise of the capstan ceased, and a hundred men sprang from the tops upon the yards, alow and aloft, and commenced loosing sails. They cast off the gaskets rapidly, and then all laid in, one man on each yard, who took their stations at the bunt gaskets, and waited for the signal from the lieutenant to "let fall." Most of the men returned to the deck, but half a dozen or more remained in each top for the purpose of overhauling the rigging, and clearing anything that happened to foul.

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"Aloft, there!" I heard the first lieutenant shout.

"Ay, ay, sir," was responded fore and aft.

"Are you ready?"

"All ready, sir," was the answer.

"Then let fall;" and in an instant the frigate was covered with canvas fore and aft.

Up went the topsails, and top-gallant sails all at once, as fast as men could run along the deck with the halyards. The other sails were not wanted until the ship was under way; so they hung by the buntlines and brails, but all ready to be sheeted home at a moment's notice.

Then I thought it was time that we should make some preparations, and I gave orders to loosen sails and man the windlass.

"Let's beat the frigate, boys," shouted the mate, springing forward.

The crew caught at the idea, and, as the chain came in, started a song, which was heard all over the harbor, and caused thousands of citizens to assemble upon the shore to see what was going on.

As soon as we had hove short, we hoisted our fore and aft sails, and then tripped anchor just as the frigate commenced feeling the morning breeze, and pointed her head for the outlet of the harbor.

We had the weather-gage of the frigate, and kept it; and as we moved along, side by side, for a few minutes, the red face of Captain Bluff was poked over the frigate's rail, and he shouted, —

"How is your wife this fine morning?"

"Well," I answered, pointing to her, seated on deck.

"That's right. Now for home."

The words were taken up by my crew, and as they catted the anchor, they sang, "For home, boys, home."

With a light breeze from the southward we passed the forts, and on the walls of the Moro I saw Armoranda and half a dozen officers standing watching the movements of the frigate and schooner, and conversing eagerly, as though some topic interested them very much; and I did not doubt that I was the subject of their remarks, but felt secure in the protection of the frigate, and cared but little for their thoughts.

As we made sail we gradually drew ahead of our stately consort, and by the time we were outside of the harbor, the frigate had studding-sails alow and aloft, and every rag set that would

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draw, for Captain Bluff did not like the idea of being outsailed, and was determined to show the Coquette that, even in a light breeze, the Growler was a match for anything that floated. But if Captain Bluff had pride in the sailing qualities of his ship, we equalled him in believing that the Coquette was never built for defeat; and as the breeze freshened we also piled on the canvas, from square-sail to topmast studding-sail, and had the satisfaction of seeing that at every bound the frigate was left astern, until towards afternoon it was impossible to distinguish her bow ports without the aid of a glass; while at sundown the Growler was hull down, and at daylight we were alone upon the ocean, with nothing in sight from the mast-head.

After a run of ten days we made Boston harbor, and learned, from the pilot whom we took on board, that the Growler had not arrived, although expected for the past ten days. This was a triumph for us, and one enjoyed by the whole crew. We walked up the harbor under a stiff breeze from the eastward, and many were the surmises as to our previous character, and some of them were pretty correct; but I was on board only as a charterer, and knew nothing of the Coquette's previous history.

As we sailed up the harbor on a pleasant afternoon in June, Gracia was delighted with everything that she saw, and admired the scenery and the islands which we passed, and wondered why such delightful localities were almost uninhabited, when they offered such sites for country villas for residences during the summer months.

We dropped anchor off Long Wharf, and towards sundown I landed with my wife and valuables, and drove to the Tremont House and secured rooms. The next day the Coquette was hauled into a snug dock at East Boston, and Mr. Prentice and the crew left for their homes, after being paid off. The mate, however, was absent but two days, when he returned, and took charge of the schooner once more; and as his wife lived with him on board, they seemed quite contented with their position.

Four days after the Coquette arrived, the Growler dropped anchor in the harbor; and I don't think I ever saw a more mortified man than Captain Bluff, when he called to see me at the hotel the evening of his arrival. But over a glass of his favorite beverage, strong and without sugar, he forgot his defeat, and talked as natural as though he was upon the quarter-deck, and five hundred men trembled at his nod.

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The next day the gold which I had on board was moved, and sent to the Suffolk Bank for deposit. Just at that time Spanish doubloons commanded a premium of fifty cents more than they were worth at Havana, consequently I sold them on the very day that they were landed, and realized some five thousand dollars' profit; and the money I safely invested in sound stocks, which paid dividends for a wonder.

Then I began to think of the diamonds I owned, and which Gracia knew nothing of. I opened my casket, and selected about thirty thousand dollars' worth, with rubies and emeralds, and those I left at a jeweller's on Washington Street, to be made into a necklace, ear-rings, breast-pins, bracelets, and finger-rings, and the balance of the stones I carried to New York, and sold in small lots for sums which exceeded my most sanguine expectations; and after I was paid in full, found that I had realized over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, not including the thirty thousand dollars' worth which I had reserved for my wife; so that I figured up my total cash accounts, not including the jewels, at almost four hundred thousand dollars, which I thought a very pretty little fortune; and I determined to enjoy myself, and let my wife see the country by travelling during the summer months.

But before we started, to satisfy my wife's scruples, we were re-married in the Catholic form of religion; and as soon as that ceremony was performed my wife had nothing to cloud her brow, excepting the fate of an expectant child; but that was born while we were at Niagara Falls, and proved to be a healthy male infant, with a face like its mother's, enough to make me feel proud of it. I engaged the best nurse that I could find to take charge of my wife, and for a month she remained at the Falls, until able to travel, when we returned to Boston, where I found letters awaiting me from Don Ingracia, and a brief one from Concha.

The Don's letter was really an affectionate one. He alluded to the service which I had rendered him, and said he could see where he had acted hastily towards me and Gracia. He was growing old, and wanted some friends around him to support his declining days. He had made a mistake, and was sorry; and if we would return, he would do all that he could to make life pleasant for both of us.

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Concha wrote a few lines, saying that a complete pardon awaited me if I needed one, and that if I was disposed to enter his service, he had a place for me.

I showed Gracia her father's letter, and asked her to make choice of a home, and that I would be governed by her wishes. She read the letter carefully, shed many tears, kissed the baby, — for she was not satisfied unless she could hold it half the time, and the little tyrant began to understand that he was of some importance, and yelled like a baby if she refused to gratify all his wants, — and at length confessed that she desired to see her father very much, and that she also wanted him to see her child, and note what a handsome one it was. She liked America, and the people; but it was not her home.

I was satisfied that she still loved her father, and wanted his forgiveness, so consented to go to Havana and spend the winter there, at any rate, and return to Boston in the spring. The Coquette had gone back many months before; so I was forced to engage a passage in a ship that was bound to Havana from Boston; and with wife, child, nurse, and servants, and a trunk full of playthings, we sailed from the city in the month of October, and after a passage of fifteen days dropped anchor in the harbor. As we passed Moro Castle, soon after sunrise (having made the port during the night; but a rule that is seldom violated prevented us from entering until daylight), and returned the hoarse hail of the officer of the Castle, my wife contrasted the time when I entered the harbor a prisoner, almost, and the time when I left it in company with the frigate Growler as a convoy.

In a few minutes after we had dropped anchor, the ship was boarded by the captain of the port, and I recognized in him my old friend, who had stood by me so firmly when I was committed to Moro Castle. Glad enough he was to see me, and insisted that I should land in his barge with all my goods and effects.

"I have been expecting you for some time," the captain said. "The captain general informed me that the past was forgotten, and that, if you and your family arrived, I was to pass all your baggage through the custom-house without an examination. That shows Concha has no ill will, for it is not every one he would show so much honor to."

"Is Don Ingracia in the city?" I asked.

"No; he is at his country seat, but he has his house in the city

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all prepared for you, and he told me to tell you to take possession immediately, and await his return. But, by the saints! there is another ship signalized, and if you will collect your trunks, I will land you at the custom-house before I board her. I don't have a moment's peace."

"Let me hope that you will find time to dine with me to-morrow," I said.

The captain smiled, and nodded his head in token of assent, from which fact I judged that he was not so much pressed as he appeared to be.

I obtained a couple of volantes, and drove to the residence of Don Ingracia, leaving my baggage to follow in the charge of a man whom the captain of the port selected for the job. We found the house ready to receive us, and servants enough to attend to all our wants. As soon as Gracia was safely installed in the room which had been fitted up expressly for us, like a true woman she had recourse to tears, the second she had shed since her marriage. But they were tears of happiness, and I let her weep without remark, for I knew that they would relieve her heart of a weight which had long pressed upon it.

That afternoon I sent off a messenger to the Don to acquaint him of our arrival, and as soon as he heard of it, he hastened to welcome us home. His meeting with me was cordial — much more so than I anticipated; but all his love was lavished on Gracia and our child. He shed many tears over both, and was content to sit for hours, and hold the infant in his arms while it slept. In his eyes it was the finest child that he had ever seen, and he insisted upon adding his name to its already formidable one; and as I made no objection, the Don was still more kindly disposed, and went to an expense of some five hundred dollars for gold forks, spoons, and trinkets.

On the first evening of our meeting, the Don and myself had a long and interesting interview. He candidly confessed I had the best right to his child; but that ambition had blinded him to my merits, and that, more, he was really rejoiced he could call me son-in-law. He offered me a choice of residences, in town, or country, or both; but he wanted the privilege of living with us, so that he could see his grandson daily. I stated to him my resources, and astonished him to think that I was comparatively a wealthy man, and needed no pecuniary assistance. He

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then made another proposition, which I accepted. I was to attend to all his business, and receive one third of the profits. He said that he was growing old, and was in need of rest.

A few days afterwards we removed to the Don's plantation, and I commenced business in earnest. I effected serious reforms, and by good management was enabled to nearly double his crop of sugar; and yet the expenses were curtailed, instead of being increased. I purchased an American mill to grind the cane, and an American steam engine to drive it, and then employed an American engineer from South Boston to look after the machinery. Old Spaniards, who had used mule power and rough mills all their lives, said that I was mad; but the Don had confidence in me, and let me do as I pleased, and the results proved me correct; and then others followed my example, and asked my advice upon matters, which they had scorned to do before. In six months I had the best gang of slaves in the country, and never lost one by running away. They were well treated, and encouraged to perform their allotted tasks cheerfully, so that when they had finished them they could work on their own account, and save money enough to purchase their freedom.

For five years I thus lived, and was happy. Not a cloud darkened my prospects. My wife was all that I could wish, and my child grew up a bright, lively boy, but was spoiled by his grandfather. My fortune increased until over a million of dollars rewarded me for my labor; but yet, just as I was in the full enjoyment of fortune's favors, the saddest blow I had ever experienced fell upon me, and for a time crushed me to the earth. My wife was taken from me so suddenly that for a time it was feared by my friends I should follow her. For weeks I was inconsolable, and spurned all consolation and rest; but one day Don Ingracia placed my child in my arms, and bade me live for its sake; and I resolved to.

Gracia died in my arms, and with her last breath blessed me. Four years have passed, and still tears will water my eyes when I recall to mind the happiness which we enjoyed, and might have enjoyed had she lived. I feel very lonely, and have travelled much during the last three years; but find no real content of mind. Cuba, from its associations, I cannot endure at present, for every scene recalls to mind my lost wife. My child is still there with its grandfather. The old gentleman needs him more

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than I do, dearly as I love the boy. The Don is growing old, and cannot allow the child out of his sight. He has made his will, and two thirds of his property will fall to the boy, and one million is put down for me; yet I feel that I have money enough, much more than I shall ever spend, and I think sometimes as though I would devote to charity what I do not really need; but I hope that there will be time enough to think of that by and by.

POSTSCRIPT.

Since I wrote the above account of my adventures, a great change has taken place in my prospects.

In my first chapter I gave an account of the saving of a young lady who had broken through the ice while skating on a small lake in the vicinity of Boston, on the banks of which I have resided for two years. I am comparatively a stranger in the town, for I have mingled but little in society since the death of my wife; yet the sight of Alice Merton's face made me think that there might be happiness in store, if I could induce her to love me, and accept me as a husband. After I saved her life, she was grateful, but reserved, for she knew nothing of my history; and although she never hinted that she desired to learn it, I felt that such was the case. I confessed everything. My sins and my virtues were set forth freely and impartially, and tremblingly I awaited her verdict. The consent of Alice's parents was easily obtained, for they knew that I had wealth, and cared but little how I accumulated it; but Alice was too noble and virtuous to throw herself into the arms of a stranger for gold, and I awaited her reply to my offer with some anxiety, and but little grounds for hope. A few days since I received a note from Alice, which read as follows: —

"You have sinned deeply, but say that you have repented sincerely. I believe you, and if I did not I should not write this note. You say that I alone can make you happy. I am young and inexperienced, and fear that I am not qualified to effect such a result; yet I will reply to your offer in the same spirit of frankness in which it is made. You saved my life at the risk of your own, and on that account I owe you a deep debt of gratitude, which perhaps is tinged with love. At any rate, if it was not I should never bid you hope. Your charities I am well acquainted

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